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Volume II
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Part I









THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION
ITS ORIGIN AND PROGRESS

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II
THE EXPANSION OF
THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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THE CHURCH IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

by

P. GARDNER-SMITH, B.D.

FELLOW OF JESUS COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

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GENERAL PREFACE

THE idea of this series of books originated with the Rev. P. Gardner-Smith, Fellow and Dean of Jesus College, Cambridge, who thought that many teachers of boys and girls would welcome a series of little books which severally might provide a term's work for their pupils, and taken all together, in sequence, supply them with the kind of knowledge of the Christian Religion and the Christian Church in the past that would explain to them the state of things by which they are confronted to-day.

We enlisted the help of Professor J. M. Creed and the Rev. J. W. Hunkin (now Archdeacon of Coventry), and the four of us together drafted the scheme and the syllabus of the different parts of it as a guide to the various writers, and have read each part. Each writer's treatment of the subject, of course, is his own, and some have not kept to the original scheme quite as closely as others have. But if we cannot hope that each part of the series will be found the most suitable book on its subject for use in Schools, we are confident that anyone who reads through the three volumes will have acquired a true perspective of the whole subject and be able to form a sound judgement of the right and the wrong of many questions in dispute to-day. We

hope, indeed, that what we have provided may be found of interest and value to many who have left their school years far behind them.

Even among those who profess and call themselves Christians and are members of Christian Churches there is widespread uncertainty and doubt as to much that has been believed in the past and been reckoned a necessary part of the faith of a Christian, and again as to the possibility of carrying on life in the world as it is without being false to the ideals of Jesus at every turn. Yet the appeal that those ideals make comes as strongly as ever to men and women of all kinds everywhere to-day, and more of them than ever before are convinced that the solution of our present problems—individual and social, economic and international—is only to be found on lines that run parallel at least with the idealism of Jesus—love of God and love of Man.

Is Christianity a failure? Is it a case of “the high that proved too high”? and though it has claimed men’s allegiance for nineteen hundred years, can it do so still? Is it still capable of being a guide to the right attitude to the world in which we find ourselves, the right way of thinking and feeling and living?

Everyone early in life ought to face these questions. But they cannot be answered by anyone who does not know what Christianity has been, how it came into being, what it had to contend with, and what it has achieved in the past.

This series of books is intended to supply sufficient knowledge of these things to suggest a reasonable answer.

The first volume gives a picture of the new society of Christians already in being, with its beliefs and its way of life, twenty or thirty years after it came into existence:—as soon, that is, as we have detailed evidence about it. To that is prefixed an account of the religious history of the Hebrew people among whom the new religion had its origin; and it is followed by a survey of the traditions about the personality and life and teaching of its Founder which were current in the society He brought into being in the early years of its existence, and since at least the middle of the second century have been regarded as inspired accounts of the actual facts.

The second volume will shew how the new religion made its way in the old world and overcame its rivals; and then will trace its history in the West and particularly in England, giving attention especially to such institutions and movements as have proved to be of lasting influence.

In the third volume the attempt is made to set out in its main features the faith of the Church in comparison with some of its rivals of to-day; to sketch the history of its worship with special reference to the English Book of Common Prayer; and finally to answer the question What is the Church's task in the world to-day?

The writers of these books are not among those who think that apology for Christianity is needed. Its chequered

history shews great ideas and ideals fighting their way to a victory that has never yet been won, except for moments and by individuals. Always new conditions and new knowledge are setting would-be Christians new problems to solve. Christianity survives in the world because it has always been able to adapt itself to different conditions of knowledge and thought and life, assimilating much that was new and transfiguring it in turn. It is still a fighting Faith and a fighting Church, making converts all over the world, with which we have to deal. But it is to a quiet survey of its origins, its characteristics, and its history that readers of these volumes are invited.

J. F. BETHUNE-BAKER

Cambridge

23 August 1929

THE CHURCH IN THE
ROMAN EMPIRE

By

P. GARDNER-SMITH, B.D.



FOREWORD

THE interest of these chapters will be much increased if they can be read with frequent reference to some collection of select passages from the Fathers. References are given in the footnotes to B. J. Kidd's *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church*. Gwatkin's *Selections from Early Christian Writers* is an alternative.

P. G.-S.

1931



CHAPTER ONE

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN the first volume of this series some account has been presented of the rise of the Christian Church, and of its early growth in Palestine and the lands of the eastern Mediterranean. It is the purpose of the present volume to look further afield and to trace the wider expansion of the Church, whereby Christianity became the religion of Europe, and in the course of centuries the situation was brought about with which we are to-day familiar. The third volume deals with the essentials of the Church's faith and looks towards the future.

At the time of our Lord's crucifixion Palestine was a part of the Roman Empire, and we must begin with a brief account of that imposing institution.

For centuries before the birth of Christ the irresistible armies of the Republic had been extending the power of Rome until it stretched from the Atlantic to the Euphrates, from the English Channel to the African desert. Then came a period of increasing disorganization, and the jealousies of rival commanders led to the Great Civil War of the first century B.C. From that grim contest the young Octavian emerged triumphant, master of the Roman world. He resigned his power into the hands of the Senate, with apologies for having played the tyrant; but the Senate, either recognizing their helplessness before the conqueror of the world, or genuinely convinced of the failure of the Republican system, entreated Octavian to retain his power as commander-in-chief of the army, and virtually supreme in all causes civil and military. Thus he became Augustus,

Princeps et Imperator, nominally responsible to the Senate, but actually more powerful than any king. Henceforth the emperor was permanently what successful generals had sometimes been temporarily, a dictator who controlled the whole machinery of the State; and so long as he retained the loyal support of the legions, he could afford to ignore the Senate if he chose. Thus civil disturbance made way for military tyranny—a common sequence in history.

Under Augustus, and under some of his abler successors, the new system worked well. For a time great civil wars were avoided, and the provinces into which the Empire was divided benefited by a less corrupt administration. The world enjoyed the blessings of peace, for although the Empire was always at war in the frontier provinces, serious invasions were prevented, and the great mass of the population dwelt in security. The Roman peace made possible the development of civilization; splendid roads were made from Rome to the remotest provinces, brigands and pirates were sternly suppressed, and commerce flourished exceedingly. The Romans lacked the original genius of the Greeks in the fields of art and literature, but they were great engineers and builders, and in the cities of the Empire luxury flourished to a degree hitherto unknown. In southern Europe many noble buildings have survived the devastation of the centuries and still remind us of the glory that has been.

The administration of the provinces was in the hands of Roman citizens of the higher classes, supported by military power. Judged by modern standards it left much to be desired, for the Romans were slow to outgrow the old idea that the provinces existed to enrich the capital. Thus taxation was often oppressive and methods of government violent and arbitrary. But on the whole there can be little

doubt that the world profited by Roman supremacy, and in most of the provinces the lot of the average man would have been more unhappy if the legions had been withdrawn.

Roman military power was unchallenged, and the legions kept the peace, but there were other great forces at work in the world in the first century. The conquests of Alexander the Great had opened up the East, destroyed national barriers, and helped the spread of Hellenic culture. The Greek language was spoken by almost everyone in the eastern part of the Empire, and even in Rome it was heard as often as the Imperial Latin. Greek philosophy was widely studied, Greek customs were almost universally practised, and it was not without reason that the Jews of Palestine described all men who did not belong to the seed of Abraham as 'Greeks'.

Hellenic culture, in spreading from Greece to the cities of the world, changed its character to some extent, becoming less aristocratic and intensive, and incorporating various foreign elements; yet for many centuries it provided the ideals of education, set the standards of art and literature, and provided the principles on which a wise man would shape his conduct. Thus the seething mass of people who inhabited Asia, Syria, Egypt, Africa and Gaul were constantly subjected in varying degrees to two powerful influences, Roman discipline and Greek culture, and the two combined to make possible a safer, richer and more varied life than any they had known before.

The religions of the Empire present a fascinating field of study. Roman religion consisted almost entirely in the due performance of traditional rites and ceremonies. In public life the officers of the State were expected to do honour to the gods who protected the city and gave victory to the Roman arms; in private life every family had its household

gods who were supposed to interest themselves in domestic concerns. But in the first century religion of this kind was on the decline, and although Augustus built many temples and took pains to revive the ancient ceremonies, the Romans of the first century were probably less concerned with religion than any people in history. They believed in a decent and proper respect for the gods, but in daily life religion counted for little. Perhaps for this reason the Romans were not missionaries. Conquest brought them into touch with many peoples and many religions, but they never attempted to plant the Roman cultus among the subject races. They were more inclined to borrow than to give. Thus the Greek gods were freely identified with those of Rome, and Jupiter took on the character of Zeus; other foreign gods were imported, and their names added to the Roman pantheon. Polytheism is a tolerant creed and a few gods more or less made very little difference. In the provinces the Romans interfered as little as possible with the established religions, only suppressing a few which were grossly immoral or in some other way constituted a danger to the State.

In the eastern part of the Empire the situation was somewhat different from that in the west. The old Greek gods, originally poetic personifications of the forces of nature, were still worshipped throughout the Hellenic world. Not that their existence was taken very seriously by the educated classes, but religion among the Greeks was closely bound up with daily life, and at least in the cities many social functions were connected with the temples of the gods. Philosophers might smile and Jews blaspheme, but the common people enjoyed their religion; it was not morally exacting, and whatever gods there might be were supposed to be gratified by its due performance.

At the Christian era the old gods of Greece and Rome were by no means the only objects of veneration. New religions were spreading from the East which claimed many votaries. Thus Isis, the Egyptian goddess, was worshipped in Rome and in many other parts of the Empire; Cybele, the 'Great Mother' of Phrygian religion, was widely revered; the name of Mithras, the Persian sun-god, was beginning to be heard; and even Judaism, though it was the faith of a despised and detested race, made many proselytes and was for a time fashionable in some circles in Rome. These foreign religions were to be taken seriously. A convert to Judaism had to face a complete change in his manner of life, and the devotees of the other gods were admitted into societies with definite rules and obligations. They were initiated by a solemn ceremony, and thus became members of a brotherhood. They believed themselves mystically united to the god, and thus assured of a happy immortality. They had a regular hierarchy, they joined in secret and mysterious rites, and in some cases they were required to submit to a moral discipline.

The popularity of the mystery cults in the Roman Empire is a testimony to the widespread desire for something more spiritually satisfying than the worship of the old gods. The mysteries were open to men and women of all classes, and they provided some kind of personal religion. Weak as they were on the moral side, they held out a hope of personal immortality, and they claimed to bring their devotees into direct touch with spiritual forces in a way the old religions had never attempted. In the days of the Empire the government did not often interfere with the mystery cults, although for a time the introduction of Isis-worship into Rome itself was resisted, and even in the second century a conservative like Tacitus could speak of Rome as the city where every filthy shame became fashionable.

The authorities were more concerned to encourage the new cult of the genius of the emperor which became popular in certain provinces during the first century, and later grew to be virtually the official religion of the Empire. The deification of great men did not seem so strange in those days as it does to us. In the provinces temples had been raised to Augustus even during his life-time; he and his successors were supposed to pass at death into the company of the immortals; and, granted that the emperors were at least potentially divine beings, their worship seemed a natural way of expressing loyalty to the government.¹ The unification of the Empire was a pressing problem, and in devotion to the genius of the emperor a bond of union was found to unite peoples widely separated by history and culture. Emperor-worship in no way interfered or competed with the worship of the other gods, and it provided an equivalent to patriotism. It was most popular in the army.

The educated classes, who were generally sceptical about religion, found consolation in the study of philosophy. The golden age of Greek philosophy was long past, but philosophical schools still survived in the great cities, and ideas derived from the thinkers of the past were widely held and keenly debated. Thus, in Alexandria the teaching of Plato was held in great esteem, and there were many Stoics at Rome. In the first century a Roman school of Stoic philosophers, less speculative and more practical than Zeno and Cleanthes, commanded a considerable following. There was much that was noble in Stoicism, many of its precepts

¹ There were some protests. 'No honour was left to the gods when Augustus chose to be himself worshipped with temples and statues, like those of the deities, and with flamens and priests.' Tacitus, *Annals* 1. 10.

were not unlike those of Christianity, and in the Emperor Marcus Aurelius it produced at least one saint; but its appeal was limited to the few, and although it helped a man to brave the misfortunes of life by suppressing all emotion, it tended to make him proud, hard, and self-sufficient. Stoicism taught the unity of the human race, and thus provided a foundation in philosophy for a world-wide Empire, and later for a Catholic Church.

The ancient world was the more in need of philosophy because ancient religion had little connexion with morals. We are so used to associate religion with morality, that we find it hard to conceive a time when religion was not an affair of morals at all. But the ancient gods were not conceived as having any strict moral character, and their worshippers could not be expected to rise to a higher level than the divinities whom they worshipped. In earlier times morality had been mainly determined and enforced by national custom, but under the disintegrating influence of imperialism custom had lost much of its force, and at the time of the Christian era there was a general loosening of moral ties. It is easy to exaggerate the immorality of the age, and we must not suppose that the crazy viciousness of Nero's court was typical of the life of the people. Yet although there was still much sober virtue among the Romans, and many happy, decent homes throughout the provinces, on the whole it is true that moral standards were low, and cities such as Antioch, Alexandria, Corinth and Rome were sinks of iniquity. Some of the popular religions helped rather than checked the general demoralization, and although the philosophers claimed to expound the art of right-living, many of them neither deserved nor enjoyed esteem.

Certain institutions in the Roman world were definitely

degrading. One was the institution of slavery. In the wars of the Republic the Romans had taken captive many thousands of foreign enemies, and these captives had been reduced to slavery. Being a form of property they were encouraged to multiply, so that in the days of the Empire their numbers were enormous. In some provinces they were said to outnumber the free men. Wealthy Romans owned not a few household slaves, like the Greeks of old, but hundreds, and even thousands, who worked in great gangs on the land, and who were kept in the necessary state of subjection by the harshest discipline and the most ruthless punishments. Until the second century a slave had no protection whatever from the law, and his owner could beat him to death or crucify him in accordance with his lightest whim. Women slaves were equally unprotected, and marriage among slaves was not recognized by law.

Slavery produced much misery among the slaves, and much demoralization among the non-servile classes. Slave owners became cruel and callous, as they always do; and the mass of the population were content to live in idleness while the slaves did the manual labour. Conditions varied in different parts of the Empire, but most of the great cities, and particularly Rome, maintained a vast population who were permanently unemployed, and who, by their numbers and unruly habits, constituted a perpetual danger to the public peace. The government endeavoured to keep them quiet by bribes and amusements; doles of corn were regularly distributed, and from time to time 'spectacles' were provided, chiefly to give the proletariat something to do.

The spectacles were in themselves demoralizing. In Greece of old the stage had provided the medium through which the poets had expressed their greatest thoughts, but

under the Empire the theatre degenerated, and the shows presented were often obscene. Still worse was the influence of the circus and the amphitheatre. The populace developed a lust for blood which could only be satisfied by beast-fights and gladiatorial combats, and the fact that in Rome it was worth while to build the Colosseum, an amphitheatre which accommodated about 80,000 spectators, shews the scale on which such entertainments were provided in the first century. Similar amphitheatres may still be seen in the Roman cities of southern France.

Such was the world into which the first missionaries of Christ went forth. To the outward eye it was a splendid world, in which the arts of life had been developed to minister to the luxury of the few, and the safety, if not the welfare, of the many. Wealth abounded, great buildings arose on every side, fine roads secured commercial prosperity, and, thanks to the legions on the frontiers, the provinces enjoyed peace. A large proportion of mankind were in some degree educated, and if the creative genius of Greece was no longer active, there was enough intellectual interest abroad to ensure that the treasures of the past would not be lost. Yet all was not well with the world. By their interest in oriental religions men were revealing their spiritual hunger, and the reckless extravagance of the rich, no less than the brutal irresponsibility of the poor, betrayed deep-seated social disease. Paganism was morally bankrupt, but the decay of the old religions prepared the way for something better, and conditions were in many ways favourable to the spread of a new religion. The successive conquests of Alexander and Rome had made the world one to a degree unknown before or since. There was regular and rapid communication between all parts of the Empire. Greek was almost a *lingua franca*. And, last but not least,

society had become a democracy, so that although the great barrier between bond and free remained, social cleavages were not otherwise deep, and the preacher of a new doctrine could obtain a hearing without presenting his social credentials. St Paul was a man of culture, but he was not ashamed of practising a trade, and Epictetus was a slave.

Humanly speaking it was the Roman Empire which made possible the developement of the Christian Church. Yet the victory of Christianity was not won without a struggle, and in the next chapter we shall see something of the opposition which the Church had to meet and overcome.

BOOKS FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

There are many books dealing with General Church History in this period. Among them may be mentioned:

H. M. GWATKIN. *Early Church History to 313.* (2 vols. Macmillan.)
DUCHESNE. *Early History of the Church.* (3 vols. John Murray.)
B. J. KIDD. *A History of the Church to A.D. 461.* (3 vols. Oxford.)
F. J. FOAKES JACKSON. *History of the Christian Church to A.D. 461.* (J. Hall and Son.)
C. BIGG. *The Origins of Christianity.* (Oxford.)
L. PULLAN. *The Church of the Fathers.* (Rivingtons.)
W. BRIGHT. *The Age of the Fathers.* (Longmans.)
D. ARMYTAGE. *Christianity in the Roman World.* (Bell.)

GIBBON. *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* Chaps. i-iii.
M. P. NILSSON. *Imperial Rome.* (G. Bell and Sons.)
H. STOBART. *The Grandeur that was Rome.* (Sidgwick and Jackson.)
H. STUART JONES. *The Roman Empire, 29 B.C.-A.D. 476.* (Fisher Unwin.)
T. R. GLOVER. *The World of the New Testament.* (Cambridge.) *The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire.* (Methuen.)

CHAPTER TWO

THE CHURCH AND THE EMPIRE

PONTIUS PILATE delivered Jesus to be crucified because his hand was forced by the Jewish authorities; to a Roman official almost anything was better than a riot, but there is no reason to suppose that he was particularly interested in the Christian movement, and so far as we know the Romans did not further concern themselves with Palestinian Christianity. But when Christian missionaries began to preach beyond the borders of Palestine, they soon came to the notice of the Roman magistrates. The Acts tells us of various occasions on which St Paul was brought before the authorities, and the book leaves him a prisoner at Rome where he was to be tried at the judgement-seat of Caesar. Yet in all these cases the interference of the Roman power was incidental, not deliberate. At Philippi, it was the masters of the maid with the spirit of divination who invoked the magistrates; at Corinth, Gallio the proconsul protected Paul; at Ephesus, the fear of Rome sufficed to quell a dangerous riot; at Jerusalem, Claudius Lysias was compelled to interfere by the violence of the crowd; and Felix and Festus only acted as judges on the complaints of the Jews. In the period covered by the Acts it is clear that the Roman power was not hostile to the Church, and the Christians profited by the determination of the government to prevent disorder and secure the rights of individuals, however unpopular they might be. In view of what we know of the tolerant attitude of the Romans towards the innumerable religions of the Empire, this is what we should expect. Unless the enemies of the Christians could convince

the authorities that the Church was a seditious organization, there was no reason why the new sect should attract particular attention, certainly none why it should be persecuted.

And yet in less than forty years after the crucifixion Christians in considerable numbers were being put to death by the express order of the emperor. The persecution by Nero is the most famous of all the trials which the Church had to meet, perhaps because two apostles, St Peter and St Paul, are generally believed to have been among the sufferers; but no contemporary Christian account has survived, and nearly all we know is derived from a passage in the *Annals* of Tacitus. From Tacitus we gather that the persecution was more or less accidental. There had been a great fire in Rome, and word went round that the half-mad emperor had deliberately started the conflagration.

So to stifle the report Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations. The populace call them Christians. Christ, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and for a time the mischievous superstition was checked. But it broke out again not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. In the first place then some were seized and confessed. Then on their evidence a vast multitude was convicted not so much of arson as of hatred of the human race. And they were not only put to death, but put to death with insult, in that they were either dressed up in the skins of beasts to perish by the worrying of dogs, or else put on crosses to be set on fire, and when the daylight failed to be burnt for use as lights by night. Nero had thrown open his gardens for that spectacle, and was giving a circus exhibition, mingling with the people in a jockey's dress or driving a chariot. Hence commiseration arose, though it was for men of the worst character and deserving of the severest punishment, on the ground that they were not destroyed for the good of the State, but to satisfy the cruelty of an individual. (*Ann. xv. 44.*)

From this account we may draw certain clear inferences. The Christians in Rome were by now numerous and fairly well known, and they were extremely unpopular with the masses who believed that they were addicted to secret crimes. The government regarded them as the kind of people who might reasonably be accused of setting fire to the city. The persecution evidently continued for some time, and not all were executed on the specific charge of arson, but rather on the general charge of being enemies of society. Whether or not the persecuting policy extended beyond the capital we have no means of knowing, but from the later books of the New Testament, such as 1 Peter and the Apocalypse, we may perhaps infer that officials of the provinces followed the lead of the central government and began to take action against a class generally thought to be criminal.

It is strange that the Christians first came into prominence as a supposed criminal society. The explanation is partly to be found in the secrecy with which their meetings were surrounded. Rumours spread. They were known to be the followers of One who had suffered a criminal's fate; they separated themselves from their fellow-men, and held meetings from which others were excluded; they were said to speak mysteriously of a great fire which would shortly destroy the world; they were scornful of the gods and refused to participate in the common religious observances; and moreover they were a social nuisance, interfering with vested interests and causing divisions in family life. It is not really surprising that in a suspicious age suspicions arose, and, as we know was the case in the second century, the most absurd stories were readily believed. It was said that the Christians ate human flesh in their common meal, and that when the lights had been put out they practised every abomination.

The Roman government was generally shrewd, and not much inclined to pay attention to every idle rumour; but it was nervous of secret societies, and unfortunately the Christians brought suspicion on themselves by their dread of idolatry. As we have seen, the worship of the emperor became a kind of official religion in the provinces. Few made any trouble about it, since to a polytheist it was natural and to a sceptic it was harmless. Only the Jews and the Christians refused to pay the required homage to the statue of the emperor. The Jews were granted exemption. The Romans did not pretend to understand their point of view, but Judaism admittedly forbade the worship of images, and since Judaism was an ancient faith, even its prejudices deserved a certain measure of respect. Rome regarded religion from a national point of view, and admitted the right of all men to worship the gods of their fathers. But the Christians were in quite a different position. They had actually deserted their ancestral customs to follow a new-fangled superstition. That proved them to be naturally impious and frivolous in matters of religion, and if they refused to pay respect to the emperor it could only be because they were traitors, and their habits of secrecy were intended to cloak their treasonable activities. On every count they deserved to be executed, and especially as belonging to a secret society which was not recognized by the government. Rome dreaded conspiracy; so much so that the Emperor Trajan took strong measures against all kinds of associations, and in one city even forbade a fire-brigade. The Christians made no secret of their refusal to obey imperial edicts on such matters. Their strange customs and solemn mien, their dark hints about a future catastrophe, their talk about a coming kingdom, their devotion to One whom they called King, and their unwillingness to

serve in the legions, all excited suspicion. Whatever their actual beliefs and practices might be, they constituted an *imperium in imperio* such as no conscientious emperor could tolerate, and they deserved to be treated with the utmost rigour.

Tradition names Domitian (81-96) as the second persecuting emperor, and we may infer from the Apocalypse, much of which seems to have been written in his reign, that in certain provinces the imperial power made a deliberate attempt to stamp out Christianity. Perhaps the emperor, notoriously suspicious of any challenge to his authority, looked upon the Church as a rival power, and encouraged the provincial governors to persecute the Christians; but there is no trace of an imperial edict, and we have no definite information. Flavius Clemens, the emperor's cousin, was executed for 'atheism', which probably means Christianity.

After Domitian, Trajan ruled (98-117). It happens that an unexpected light is shed on the relations of the Empire to the Church by a letter which Pliny the Younger wrote to the emperor about the year 112. The administration of the province of Bithynia had been lax, and Pliny was sent to restore discipline and order. He found great numbers of Christians in Bithynia, and although he had not previously been concerned in actions against them, he assumed that it was his duty to suppress the movement. So he had some well-known Christians arrested and brought before him. He asked them whether it was true that they were Christians, and on their admitting the charge he repeated the question a second and third time. If they persisted he ordered them away to execution, for whatever else they were guilty of, their obstinacy deserved to be punished.

But Pliny found the case less simple than he had

expected. Thanks partly to an anonymous informer he discovered how widespread was the movement, and the number of his prisoners began to increase to an alarming extent. Some of those arrested denied the charge, offered incense to the emperor's statue, and cursed the name of Christ ('none of which things, it is said, those who are really Christians can be made to do'). But many others, including women and children, were less accommodating, and Pliny hesitated to put them all to death. His perplexity was increased by his inability to discover any serious crime of which the Christians had been guilty. Even the renegades declared that they had only joined in religious observances and shared a common meal, and two deaconesses who were tortured to extract information disclosed only 'a base and arrogant superstition'. What did Trajan advise him to do?

The emperor's reply was neither clear nor consistent. He commended Pliny for his action but declared that no hard-and-fast rule could be laid down. Then he went on to define a policy. The Christians were not to be hunted out, but if accused they must be punished. Trajan added two reservations; those who denied that they were Christians should be discharged, and no notice must be taken of anonymous letters.

The correspondence reveals a curious situation. It was commonly believed that the Christians were criminals, and should therefore be punished. The government accepted current rumours, despite the lack of evidence. Yet a wise emperor like Trajan did not wish to push matters to extremes, and if the Christians kept out of his way he was prepared to let them alone. He at least cannot have regarded them as very desperate criminals, and he evidently did not look upon the growth of the Church as constituting a serious danger to the State.

So far as we can judge, that was the attitude of most of the emperors of the second century. They knew very little about the Christians, and they disapproved of the movement, but they were not violently opposed to the Church. Marcus Aurelius is perhaps the only exception. He was a Stoic philosopher, and a Roman of the old type, concerned to revive Roman discipline and Roman virtue. To him the Christians appeared as a vulgar mob of sentimental degenerates, and though he does not seem to have issued any general edict in favour of persecution, the fact that he was known to dislike the Christians encouraged local administrators to take action, or at least to allow popular hatred to have free play. Thus in Asia the detestable informers began their work again, and in Gaul the churches were exposed to the fury of the populace.

A document has survived which illustrates the sufferings of the Church under the saintly Marcus. The churches of Lyons and Vienne addressed a letter to their 'brethren throughout Asia and Phrygia who hold the same faith and hope with us', describing their recent experiences. It is too long to quote, but as providing an example of what the Christians in the second century were always exposed to, it is well worth reading.¹ Chief of the martyrs was a slave-girl, Blandina, who not only endured tortures so dreadful that her tormentors marvelled that she still breathed, but remained to the end the support and inspiration of the others.

The Romans were strangely indifferent to human suffering, but it was not a mere love of cruelty which caused the authorities to put the Christians to death. There were many just and merciful magistrates who executed the obstinate, although they did their best to persuade them to recant. The African writer, Tertullian, mentions several

¹ Eusebius, *H.E.* v. 1. B. J. Kidd, *Documents*, No. 57.

such cases,¹ and a document which dates from about the same time as the letter from Lyons and Vienne relates how the proconsul of Africa, Saturninus, entreated certain martyrs from the town of Scilli to take time for consideration before they threw away their lives.² The attitude of the Christians was incomprehensible to the Roman mind, and there was a general feeling that a sect whose tenets were so mysterious, whose practices were so strange, and whose mentality was so unusual, ought to be exterminated in the interests of society.

In spite of all, the Church continued to grow, and the increasing alarm of the government was expressed in an edict of Septimius Severus (202) forbidding anyone to become a Jew or a Christian. On the strength of this edict there was further savage persecution in certain provinces. In Africa the famous martyrs Perpetua, Revocatus, Felicitas, Saturninus and Secundulus suffered,³ and in Egypt Clement, the learned head of the Catechetical school, was driven into hiding, while a number of his pupils were burnt alive. Probably the same kind of thing was going on in other provinces.

Whether or not historians may justify the hostility of the Empire to the Church, the Christians themselves felt that they were the victims of ignorance and prejudice, and in the latter half of the second century a number of writers endeavoured to present the Christian case in a clear and reasoned manner. These writers are known as the 'Apolologists' from the Greek word 'apologia', a defence. The earliest of them date from the reign of Hadrian (117-138),

¹ *Ad Scapulam*, IV.

² *Passio Martyrum Scillitanorum*. Kidd, *Documents*, No. 67.

³ *Passio S. Perpetuae* (Cambridge Texts and Studies); Mason, *Historic Martyrs*, pp. 88 ff.

an emperor whose wide interests seemed to promise a fair hearing for those who pleaded a just cause. Some Apologists addressed themselves to the Senate, and others to the public at large. Enough of their works survive to enable us to understand what was the line of defence generally followed.

We may take as an example a celebrated apology written by a Greek-speaking Christian called Justin, who, owing to his subsequent fate, is generally referred to as Justin Martyr. A Samaritan by birth, he became a Christian after trying one after another of the various systems of philosophy, and so he is typical of the more cultured and liberal of the early Fathers. Justin complains bitterly of the unfairness of the treatment to which the Christians are subjected, for they are condemned and executed for no proved crime, but merely for a name—and a very good name too!¹ He then goes on to refute the silly scandals that were current about the Church, and to explain something of Christian faith and practice.

A longer and more elaborate work on the same lines was written forty years later by Tertullian,² an African lawyer who was converted to Christianity in early life. Tertullian not only denies the false reports about the Christians, and explains their true position, but he carries the war into the enemy's country with a vigorous attack on heathenism. Who were the heathen to accuse anyone of immorality or impiety? They would never invent such wicked charges unless they were guilty of the same things themselves; and even if it were true that the Christians worshipped an ass's head on a pole, the heathen, who worship gods with dogs' heads and fishes' tails, were in no position to jeer. Tertullian was a master of irony and sarcasm, and his *Apology* is most

¹ *Christus*, apparently pronounced *Chrestus*—‘good’.

² Kidd, *Documents*, Nos. 87–92.

entertaining. We cannot say whether it achieved its object in enlightening the authorities, but it has proved invaluable to later historians for the light it throws on contemporary beliefs and practices among the Christians; and although the author's defiant and uncompromising tone was hardly likely to conciliate the magistrates, it shews how unconquerable was the spirit of the Church. *Sanguis semen Christianorum!*

There are other apologies of various types. Justin, in addition to two apologies properly so-called, published a long argument with a certain Trypho, a Jew, in which the claim of Christianity to fulfil Old Testament prophecy is fully set out. An anonymous *Letter to Diognetus* presents the case for the Christian religion in charming style.¹

The Christians live in their own countries, but only as sojourners; they share the life of citizens, they endure the lot of foreigners; every foreign land is to them a fatherland, and every fatherland is a foreign land.... They spend their existence upon earth, but their citizenship is in heaven.... They love all men, and they are persecuted by all. They are unknown, and yet they are condemned by all.... They are abused, yet they repay insult with honour.

The letter to Diognetus is written in Greek, but there is an equally pleasing book written in Latin known as the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix². It describes an argument held on the sea-shore at Ostia, near Rome, between a heathen, Caecilius Natalis, and his Christian friend, Octavius Januarius. Caecilius admits that he is a sceptic, but advocates the practice of Rome's old religion as the source of Rome's greatness. Christianity he denounces as a base and immoral superstition. Octavius makes a spirited reply. After a drastic exposure of the follies of polytheism, and a denial of the usual gossip about the Church, he gives a beautiful picture of Christianity as it really is. Caecilius

¹ Extract, Kidd, *Documents*, No. 29.

² *Ibid.* No. 66.

acknowledges that he is defeated, and declares his willingness to accept further instruction.

Apologies continued to be written until the end of the persecutions, and indeed they are written still. Origen, the great Christian scholar of Alexandria in the third century, wrote a powerful defence of Christianity in answer to Celsus, a heathen philosopher who had made a damaging attack on the faith of the Church. Two hundred years later Augustine wrote *The City of God* in answer to the half-converted heathen who ascribed the fall of Rome to its desertion of the old gods. And there were many more. How far the Apologists achieved their aim of creating interest and even faith among the heathen we do not know, but they did much to set Christianity upon a firm intellectual basis. We may be sure that they strengthened the faith of their Christian brethren, and perhaps they strengthened their own.

ADDITIONAL NOTE ON THE APOLOGISTS

The Apologists in general devote much of their space to an indictment of heathenism, enlarging on the folly and immorality of idolatry. They also protest vigorously against the unfairness and illegality of the treatment meted out to the Church by the authorities. But on the positive side their arguments for Christianity fall under four main heads.

Firstly, they appeal to prophecy in order to prove that the events of the gospel history belong to the eternal purpose of GOD. It was this argument which converted Justin Martyr, and in his apologetic writings he appeals to it with great confidence. Indeed, it was generally regarded as providing the strongest evidence for the truth of the Gospel.

'In these books of the prophets', says Justin, 'we found Jesus our Christ foretold as coming, born of a virgin, growing up to man's

estate, healing every disease and every sickness, raising the dead, being hated and unrecognized and crucified, and dying, and rising again, and ascending into heaven, and being, and being called, the Son of God. We find it predicted also that certain persons should be sent by him into every nation to publish these things, and that rather among the Gentiles men should believe in him [than among the Jews].'
(*1 Apol.* xxxi.)

Justin goes on to establish every reference in detail. Many of his interpretations of the Old Testament seem to us fanciful, but in an age in which scientific criticism was unknown the Apologists had no difficulty in discovering references to Christ on almost every page of the Jewish Scriptures. Their arguments did not always carry conviction, as we see from Justin's *Dialogue* with Trypho the Jew, an elaborate discussion of Old Testament references of which Trypho denies the Christian interpretation.

Secondly, the Apologists make appeal to the evidence of miracles, not only the miracles recorded in the gospels, but also those ascribed to Christians of their own age. In particular it was firmly believed that the Church had power over demons, and this power was regarded as a clear proof of the divinity of Christ in whose name they were expelled. Thus Tertullian writes to Scapula, 'The clerk of one of your advocates who was liable to be thrown on the ground by an evil spirit was set free from his affliction; as was also the relative of another, and the little boy of a third. And how many men of rank (to say nothing of the common people) have been delivered from demons and healed of diseases!' (*ad Scapulam*, iv). The same author in his *Apology* writes, 'All the power and authority we have over the demons is from our naming the name of Christ.... Fearing Christ in God and God in Christ, they become subject to the servants of God in Christ' (*Apol.* xxiii). Justin bears similar testimony. 'For numberless demoniacs

throughout the whole world many of our Christian men, exorcizing them in the name of Christ, have healed and do heal' (11 *Apol.* vi). Cyprian, drawing on the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix, describes the expulsion of demons: 'You may see them at our voice, and by the operation of the hidden majesty, smitten with stripes, burnt with fire, racked with the increase of a growing punishment, howling, groaning, entreating, confessing whence they came—and either springing forth at once, or vanishing gradually' (*de Van. Idol.* vii, cf. *Octavius* xxvii).

Thirdly, the Apologists dwell on the internal evidences of Christianity, contrasting the reasonableness and nobility of its doctrines with the gross absurdities of polytheism. Thus Tertullian wrote a treatise concerning the natural testimony of the human soul. Anxious to claim what support they could from writers of repute, some of the Apologists maintained that the philosophers of Greece were divinely inspired to rise above heathen conceptions; and Justin asserts that even the 'godless' Socrates was the vehicle of the Logos of God, and was a Christian before Christ.

Lastly, the Apologists pointed to the moral and spiritual effects of Christian faith as the best evidence of its truth. Philosophers had no message for the vicious and degraded, but the Gospel could change the life and character of the most abandoned sinner. Many passages might be quoted, but one from Origen's reply to Celsus must suffice:

When we consider that those discourses which Celsus terms 'vulgar' are filled with power as if they were spells, and see that they at once convert multitudes from a life of licentiousness to one of great regularity, and from a life of wickedness to something better, and from a state of cowardliness and unmanliness to one of such high-toned courage as to lead men to despise even death through the piety which shews itself within them, why should we not justly admire the power which they contain?

(*contra Celsum* LXVIII.)

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CHAPTER THREE

THE FINAL STRUGGLE

DESPITE the work of the Apologists, the Empire grew increasingly hostile to the Church. No doubt its continued growth in the face of persecution was alarming. Towards the end of the second century Tertullian made his famous boast: 'We are men of yesterday, yet we have filled all your resorts, your cities, islands, fortresses, towns, market-places, the very camp—the palace, the senate, the forum. We have left you only your temples!' This was rhetoric, and the number of the Christians was still small in comparison with the total population; but their ubiquity alarmed the authorities, and in many places their influence was greater than their numbers would suggest. A great expansion of the Church took place in the third century, and between 249 and 313 the war between the Church and the Empire reached its climax.

Things were going badly for the Empire. After the death of Septimius Severus (211) the army got thoroughly out of hand, and the soldiers set up emperor after emperor only to murder him in a few months. Between 211 and 284 there were twenty-three emperors, and so weak did the central authority become that there was at one time a serious danger of the Empire's breaking up into independent provinces. The barbarians seized their opportunity. Germans invaded Gaul in 236, and they were not driven out for twenty years. The Goths crossed the Danube in 247, defeated and slew the Emperor Decius in 251, and remained the scourge of the central provinces until subdued by Aurelian in 270. In the east the Persians crossed

the Euphrates, defeated Valerian in 260, and even captured Antioch in Syria. So critical was the general situation that Aurelian fortified Rome itself.

Nor was war the only disaster. Plague and famine swept over the Empire, reducing the production of wealth, disorganizing trade, and leaving whole provinces half depopulated. As trade declined taxation increased, and the ever-growing demands of the tax-collector left the exhausted provincials hardly enough to support life, much less to develop the arts of civilization.

To conscientious rulers all this was distressing, and the better emperors tried to revive the customs, virtues, and institutions of former days. Rome had been great, and it should be possible to restore its greatness if the people could be brought back to a respect for ancient customs. Degeneracy was manifest on every hand and not least in the matter of religion. These Christians with their social radicalism, their contempt for the gods, their unwillingness to serve in the army, and their doubtful loyalty to the Empire must be at the bottom of it all, and if the Empire was to be saved they must be put down with a firm hand.

So from the middle of the third century the relations of the Church and the Empire entered on a new phase. It was no longer a question of desultory persecution by a zealous official here and there, and the unreasoning hatred of the populace no longer blazed out in savage demonstrations against the enemies of the human race. In the later persecutions the civil power had made up its mind to crush Christianity as an institution fatal to the health of the State. The policy of the emperors was deliberate and carefully thought out, and action against the Church was not only merciless, but simultaneous in all parts of the Empire.

Trouble began when Decius Trajan became emperor in 249. He was a Roman of the stern old type, an elderly senator who had been raised to the purple by the mutinous legions of Maesia. He resolved to restore the Empire if he could, and his eye fell upon the Christians. 'In the prosecution of his general design to restore the purity of Roman manners, he was desirous of delivering the Empire from what he condemned as a recent and criminal superstition' (Gibbon, ch. xvi). So the first general edict against the Christians was published early in 250. Its exact wording has not survived, but its purport is known. Every inhabitant of the Empire was to sacrifice to the gods before a certain day. Magistrates were ordered to summon the inhabitants of each locality to a temple, call over the roll, and see that everyone renounced Christ and paid the proper devotions to the gods. The magistrates obeyed. Those who sacrificed were given certificates securing them from further molestation, those who refused were committed to prison where every effort was made, by torture and other means, to break down their resolution. As a last resort the faithful were exiled or put to death.

The new policy of the Empire was to make apostates rather than martyrs, and there can be no doubt that it was deplorably successful. Some of the clergy apostasised at once. Others, like St Cyprian of Carthage, went into hiding, preferring to risk the charge of cowardice rather than to allow the Church to be deprived of all its leaders at once. Many Christians endured great sufferings, and many more were put to death, but there were great numbers who either denied the faith outright, or compromised by some discreditable evasion. Thus, many bought certificates from their heathen neighbours, others bribed the officials or their clerks, others again left their homes and sought refuge

in some remote country district. The general result was the complete disorganization of the Church, and if the persecution had gone on long enough irreparable harm might have been done. But it soon flagged. The policy of the emperor was popular neither with the magistrates nor with the populace and, when in the spring of 251 Decius left Rome on military duty, the persecution began to slacken at once. He fell in battle in August of the same year, and the persecution stopped. The Church had a respite in which to collect its scattered forces.

But it was only a respite, for persecution was renewed under Valerian (253-260). In the last three years of his reign the emperor issued two edicts, the first aimed at the clergy and the second at all persons of rank who might be foolish enough to profess Christianity. By these edicts it was hoped to disorganize the Church and make Christianity no more than a superstition of the vulgar. The confiscation of all property belonging to the Christians was part of the emperor's plan, and by this means he hoped to enfeeble the Church while he enriched the State. There were many martyrdoms,¹ but the Church was stronger than it had been in 250, and Valerian's time was short. After his capture by the Persians in 260 the Church, like Israel of old, had peace for forty years.

Then came the last and greatest struggle. In 283 Diocletian was chosen by the soldiers to succeed Numerian, who had just been murdered in the camp. Though of servile origin Diocletian was a great man, and without delay he undertook the civil and military reorganization of the Empire. His first act was to divide the *imperium* between himself and an old comrade, Maximian; these two became 'Augusti', and a few years later two subordinate emperors,

¹ Among them, that of Cyprian of Carthage.

Galerius and Constantius, were given the title of 'Caesar'. This made it more difficult for a successful adventurer to seize the Empire, for if he killed one of the emperors, he still had the others to deal with. In another way Diocletian made assassination more difficult. Hitherto the emperors had lived the life of soldiers, and in moments of confusion it had not been difficult for disloyal officers to murder them. Diocletian and his colleagues surrounded themselves with all the pomp of oriental rulers, and thus they became less accessible to their subjects. The administration of the Empire was overhauled, a huge beaurocracy was set up, and at great cost efficiency was restored. For a time the new policy worked well: the provinces were reduced to order and, after a long war, peace was made with the Persians. The seat of government was moved from Rome to Milan for the West, and to Nicomedia in Bithynia for the East.

For nearly twenty years Diocletian left the Christians alone. He was a heathen and had no sympathy with the Church, but he may have been mindful of the failure of the persecuting policy under Decius and Valerian, and besides, he had his hands full with other matters. Then suddenly his policy changed. Diocletian's Caesar, Galerius, was the Church's bitterest enemy, and it was probably due to his influence that Diocletian made up his mind to put down Christianity.

There were several edicts of increasing severity. The first was published early in 303, and it ordered the destruction of Christian churches and the burning of Christian scriptures. The edict seems to have angered the Christians rather than to have frightened them; it was torn down, and acts of violence followed. Fires broke out in the palace which were ascribed to Christian incendiaries. So in a few

weeks a second edict ordered the arrest of all the clergy. Still there was no bloodshed, and six months later most of the clergy were free again. Then Diocletian fell sick, and Maximian and Galerius had a free hand. They returned to the policy of Decius, and by an edict published in the spring of 304 ordered everyone to sacrifice on pain of death. If this policy had failed fifty years before, it was not likely to succeed now when the Christians were more numerous and better known. Even the heathen condemned it, and shewed an inclination to shelter the Christians, whilst many magistrates did their best to avoid passing sentence of death. In some places Christians were marched quickly past the altars, no one caring to notice whether they sprinkled incense or not, whilst those who protested were knocked on the head to keep them quiet until the ceremony was over. Nevertheless, the number of martyrdoms was very great, and many Christians suffered inhuman tortures. Only in Gaul and Britain, where the Caesar Constantius had no enthusiasm for the work of blood, were the Christians comparatively safe.

We need not follow in detail the complicated political history of the next few years. Diocletian and Maximian abdicated in 305, and Galerius became Augustus in the East, with a nephew, Maximin Daza, more brutal than himself, to assist him in the capacity of Caesar. Together they kept the persecution going till the death of Galerius in 311, and Maximin persecuted in Egypt and Syria for two years longer. We have no reason to doubt the accounts of two contemporary writers, Eusebius and Lactantius, although the description they give of the horrors endured by the Christians is almost incredible. Nero's persecution had been child's play compared with this, and if Lactantius displays an unchristian satisfaction at the dreadful deaths

of the persecutors¹ we must make allowances for the spirit of fanaticism such a policy is bound to engender.

Deliverance came from the West. Constantius Chlorus died in 306, and the legions at York proclaimed his popular son Constantine Augustus. Galerius, who knew him to be favourably disposed to the Christians, would only allow him the title of Caesar; but whatever his title he was supreme in Gaul and Britain. After the death of Galerius the empire of the West was disputed by Constantine who held Gaul, and Maxentius, son of Maximian, who had usurped power in Italy and Spain. Another emperor, Licinius, ruled in the central provinces, while Maximin Daza held sway in the East. Constantine invaded Italy, routed and slew Maxentius at the battle of the Milvian Bridge (312), and then made an alliance with Licinius. Together the two emperors put forth the Edict of Milan (313) which granted complete toleration to the Christian Church.

We judge it consonant to right reason that no man should be denied leave of attaching himself to the rites of the Christians, or to whatever other religion his mind direct him.... Accordingly the open and free exercise of their respective religions is granted to all others as well as to Christians; for it befits the well-ordered state and tranquillity of our times that each individual be allowed, according to his own choice, to worship the Divinity.²

The edict goes on to order the restitution of all property confiscated from the Christians, promising compensation to private individuals who have bought Church property and who must now surrender it.

¹ Galerius, like Herod Agrippa I, was 'eaten of worms'. Maximin took poison, but he did not take enough and died after enduring great agony for days.

Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, chs. 33, 49.

² Lactantius, *op. cit.* ch. 48, gives the edict as published by Licinius in the East.

The importance of the Edict of Milan can hardly be exaggerated. It did not establish Christianity as the religion of the Empire, for Licinius was a heathen, and even Constantine did not yet declare his personal convictions, but it proclaimed, almost for the first time in history, the right of a man to possess a conscience, and to follow it in matters of religion. Unhappily the spirit of the edict was far in advance of the times. Even its authors may have regarded it more as a political expedient than as a statement of principle, for Licinius did a little persecuting before his death in 323, and Constantine oppressed the heathen in his later years. Nearly fifteen hundred years had to pass before freedom of conscience thus enunciated by two Roman emperors came to be honoured not only in word but in deed. When a few years later the Christians found themselves supreme, they shewed no inclination to tolerate the 'lying rites' of paganism, and the long struggles between orthodoxy and heresy in the next two centuries exhibit anything but a spirit of toleration. Yet it was all to the good that the true principle should have been stated, and the immediate effect of the edict was to give peace to the Church.

Prosperity followed, and the tide flowed fast towards Christianity. The noble constancy of the martyrs had had its effect, and many men, particularly now that the danger was over, felt that such courage could not be explained as merely fanatical devotion to a debased superstition. It is to be feared that some of the new converts were not unmindful of the advantage of being on the side favoured by the emperor, especially after 323, when Constantine defeated Licinius and became the sole ruler of the Roman world. It soon became fashionable to be a Christian, and by the end of the fourth century an acknowledged heathen

was in the position of a survivor from other days. The Church increased rapidly in numbers, wealth and power; though whether it increased in sanctity is more doubtful. It was difficult to instruct and train tens of thousands of heathen converts, many of whom became Christians more because it was now the fashionable thing to do than from any very deep personal conviction. For three centuries the Church had been saving men from the world, now it was confronted with the far harder task of saving the world itself. It is untrue to say that the Church failed, but we dare not say that it succeeded.

However disappointing the history of the succeeding centuries may be, we should not deny to Constantine the praise which his liberality deserves. Not only did he put a stop to the sufferings of the Christians, but he did all that was in his power to help the Church to recover and expand. He granted large sums of money for the building of churches and for the copying of the Scriptures. He exempted the Christian clergy from taxation, and freed them from onerous civil duties. He interposed to help the Church in settling its internal disputes, and he summoned the Council of Nicaea. Much of his legislation was inspired by respect for the Church and its teaching—notably his merciful laws regarding outcasts, slaves and animals.¹ Constantine's life and character are a puzzle to the historian, and his

¹ Constantine tried to stop the exposing of infants by granting help to parents who were too poor to rear their children, and he regulated legal adoption. He forbade the crucifixion of slaves, and stopped the practice of branding them upon the face, 'since it is the image of the heavenly beauty'. He even ordered the drivers of the post horses to treat their animals mercifully, and not to beat them with heavy sticks. For a full account of Constantine's legislation, see B. J. Kidd, *History of the Church to 461*, Vol. II, pp. 5-10, where references are given.

religious views are uncertain. He was capable of dreadful crimes, such as the execution of his son Crispus, and he was not unmindful of the practical help which Christians might give in his task of unifying the Empire under his control; but cynical historians have no right to represent him as a time-serving hypocrite. Constantine was a great soldier and a great emperor, and if for a time he found it hard, and perhaps unwise, to make up his mind on matters of religion, we must remember his difficulties and the age of transition in which he lived. When he died in 337, still clothed in the white robes assumed after his recent baptism, he left a Church free to carry out its mission in the world, and equipped as well as it lay within his power to equip it. In the East they gave him the title 'Equal to the Apostles'. He was not that, but he was a good friend to the Church and a great man.

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CHAPTER FOUR

LIFE IN THE EARLY CHURCH. I

THE atmosphere of uncertainty in which the Christians lived during the first three centuries of the Church's history was not altogether unhealthy. The ever-present danger of persecution secured the purity of the Church during a critical period of its developement. It guaranteed the sincerity of the Church's members and it helped to maintain their enthusiasm. Merely nominal Christians, who are always a source of weakness to the Church, were weeded out whenever there was a threat of persecution, and those who remained were of the kind who were willing to die for the faith. Not that they all attained to a high standard of sanctity. There were many failures and not a few scandals even in the early days; but on the whole we may look back to the first three centuries of our era as the heroic age, when a standard was maintained from which the victorious Church of the fourth century somewhat rapidly declined.

So long as the Christian Church was a small and unpopular society it was natural that the corporate spirit should be strong. The Christians felt themselves to be brothers and comrades united in devotion to a common cause. This spirit was reflected in the rapid developement of the institutions and organization of the Church. We get the first glimpses of this developement in the New Testament. In the Acts we hear of meetings for prayer and the transaction of the necessary business of the community at Jerusalem. We hear of efforts to relieve the poor by the generosity of the rich, and of the need which soon arose for the appointment of officials to organize charity and look after matters of business. Preaching and teaching were the chief concern

of the Apostles, but before long we read of 'the Apostles and Elders' meeting in solemn conclave under the presidency of James to decide important questions of policy (Acts xv).

Very soon Christian communities were established in other cities. There was preaching in Samaria; Caesarea heard the Gospel; and there were so many believers at Antioch that they came to be well known and were dubbed 'Christians' (Christ-men) for short (Acts xi, 26). Then St Paul began his missionary labours, and when he died there were flourishing churches not only in Asia Minor, but in Greece, Macedonia, Rome, and probably in other parts of the Empire.

We do not know very much about the organization of these local communities, but we read in Acts that it was St Paul's custom to appoint elders in the churches which he founded,¹ and we cannot doubt that from the first each church had its leaders and responsible officials. In two passages St Paul gives a list of those who are set apart for the performance of definite functions. In Ephesians iv, 11 he writes: 'GOD gave some to be Apostles, some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers'; and there is a longer list in 1 Cor. xii, 28.² In Acts xx, 28 St Paul, in addressing the elders of the Church at Ephesus, calls them 'episcopoi', a word which the Authorized Version translates 'overseers', that is, those who have authority to exercise oversight in the Church. From it we get our word

¹ Acts xiv, 23. The Greek word for elder is 'presbuteros', an older man. Priest is another form of the same word, but it has come to be used as equivalent to the Greek 'hiereus' and the Latin 'sacerdos', words which have quite a different signification. Christian ministers were not called 'priests' in this sense for two hundred years.

² The whole of 1 Cor. xii is worth reading in this connexion.

'bishops'. There were such 'bishops' at Philippi (Phil. i, 1), where we also read of 'deacons', or ministers, who seem to belong to a definite class or order. It is very probable that organization varied in different churches, and officials were not always called by the same names; but it is clear that every church formed a compact society with a definite membership, duly appointed officers, and recognized standards of faith and practice. What those standards were we can gather from a careful study of the Epistles of St Paul and other books of the New Testament.

Admission to the Church was by baptism;¹ and closely connected with baptism were those 'spiritual gifts' which were ascribed to the direct agency of the Holy Spirit.² At first preparation for baptism was short, and little seems to have been required beyond acknowledgement of sin, and a confession that 'Jesus is Lord'³, but as time passed increasing importance was attached to the preparation of candidates for baptism. They were called 'catechumens' (i.e. persons under instruction, being 'catechized') and were carefully taught the nature and implications of the Christian faith.

With regard to baptism, probably our earliest authority outside the New Testament is the *Didache*, or *The Teaching of the Apostles*, a little book of instruction which may belong to the first century. There we read:

And concerning baptism, baptize ye thus. Having first declared all these things,⁴ baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son

¹ Matt. xxviii, 19, Acts ii, 38, viii, 36, ix, 18, x, 47, xxii, 16, Rom. vi, 3, 1 Cor. xii, 13 etc.

² Mark i, 8, Jn. i, 33, Acts i, 5, x, 40-48, 1 Cor. xii, xiii, xiv.

³ Phil. ii, 11, 1 Cor. xii, 3.

⁴ From the context the moral requirements of the Christian life appear to be meant, but in later times a recitation of belief was the immediate pre-requisite of baptism.

and of the Holy Ghost in living (running) water. But if thou have not living water, baptize in other water; and if thou canst not in cold, then in warm. But if thou have neither, pour water thrice upon the head in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And before the baptism let the baptizer and him that is baptized fast, and such others as can.

(*Didache*, ch. vii; trans. C. Bigg.)

The baptism of converts was naturally a very great occasion in the life of the early Church. The usual time was Easter or Whitsuntide, and the final preparation was marked with a solemn fast. If circumstances permitted the candidates were totally immersed three times, after which they were clothed in white robes (the symbol of purity) and given milk and honey (the symbol of their entry into the promised land). After baptism they received the laying on of hands in token of the gift of the Holy Spirit, and were admitted to the full privileges and responsibilities of their membership in the Church.

At the period concerning which we have any full information baptism was administered by the bishop, whatever may have been the custom in earlier times. It was obviously important that no convert should be admitted to the Church without general knowledge and consent, and therefore the approval of the bishop was required. In fact it was considerations of discipline and convenience that seem to have led the Church at an early date to adopt a system of government by one bishop in each local community, rather than by a council of elders or bishops. In New Testament times we read of 'bishops' in the plural, and even early in the second century some churches seem to have been content with presbyters only.¹ But the

¹ Clement of Rome is traditionally the author of a famous letter from Rome rebuking the factious spirit of the Christians at Corinth. Clement does not write in his own authority as bishop,

developement of a system of government by a single bishop came rapidly. About 115 a certain Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, was sent by an overland route to die in the arena at Rome. On his way he wrote a number of letters to various churches which had ministered to his needs during the journey, and in these epistles he insists in the strongest terms on the duty of obedience to the bishop. The churches to which he writes seem to have been fully organized with a three-fold ministry of bishop, presbyters and deacons. Ignatius is deeply impressed with the need for the preservation of order and unity, and he believes that it is only by unquestioning obedience to the clergy that such unity can be maintained. Some of his language is extravagant, but local churches were not immune against party strife, as we see at Corinth in the days of St Paul, and again in the time of Clement. Government by committee is only efficient when there is a strong chairman, and in the circumstances of the time probably an autocracy was the only guarantee of peace. So we find that 'monarchical episcopacy' was established by the middle of the second century, and it was commonly believed that the system went back to the days of the Apostles.¹ The elders or 'presbyters' did not cease to exist when the churches came under the rule of bishops. They formed an advisory council

and it is clear that there was no bishop in Corinth at the time, else it would have been his business to deal with the 'sedition' which had arisen and which had resulted in the deposition of certain presbyters. Clement still uses 'bishop' and 'presbyter' as synonymous terms (ch. 44). The letter is generally dated about 95, but it may be rather later. It is to be noted that even Ignatius does not speak of a bishop of Rome.

¹ Thus Hegesippus (*c.* 160) and Irenaeus (*c.* 180) drew up lists of the bishops of Rome from the days of Peter and Paul. What evidence they had we do not know.

and assisted the bishop in teaching and in performing the rites of the Church. In the fourth century, and probably earlier, they exercised pastoral care over certain districts in the great cities, and in fact worked very much like a staff of curates in a big modern parish. Thus gradually the later system came into being according to which a bishop rules over a large area in which many presbyters live and work. In the second century a bishop occupied a position more like that of the rector of a large parish today.

The deacons formed a third order in the ministry.¹ Every local Christian community had many business concerns which were not considered to belong to the more spiritual functions of the presbyters, and it was the duty of the deacons to look after these matters. Thus they made arrangements for the meetings of the congregation, kept the accounts, administered charity, and generally superintended the organization of the Church.² There were also deaconesses for dealing with the women (Rom. xvi, 1).

A society is not likely to survive long unless its members meet together frequently, a fact which was recognized in the Christian Church from the first.³ St Luke tells us of the meetings for prayer in Jerusalem, and there are other references in Acts to Christian assemblies.⁴ St Paul has much to say about the meetings at Corinth,⁵ and later writers give some graphic accounts of the Christian gatherings. In the earliest times these meetings had as their centre

¹ Acts vi may record the institution of the diaconate, but 'the seven' are not called deacons. 'Diaconia' was a vague word descriptive of any useful ministration. St Paul uses it of his own labours, and calls himself 'diaconos', which suggests that the word had not yet acquired an exclusively technical signification.

² The modern deacon is regarded as a probationary priest, but it was not so in the early days when their functions were quite distinct.

⁴ E.g. Acts xx, 7 ff.

³ Heb. x, 25.

⁵ 1 Cor. xi, 17 ff.

the common meal, the Lord's Supper, as St Paul calls it. When Pliny consulted Trajan on the subject of the Christians in Bithynia he told the emperor that he had discovered that the Christians were accustomed to meet for a meal, but it was ordinary harmless food that they ate.¹ In the catacombs at Rome are drawings of Christians sitting round a table, eating bread and fish, and drinking wine. The Eucharist (i.e. thanksgiving) was at first a solemn rite celebrated as part of this feast. The *Didache* gives what is probably the earliest account.

On the Lord's day come together and break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your transgressions that your sacrifice may be pure. (Ch. xiv.) As regards the eucharist give ye thanks in this manner. First for the cup, 'We thank Thee, O Father, for the holy vine of David thy servant. Glory be to Thee for ever'. And for the broken bread, 'We thank Thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge which thou didst make known unto us through Jesus thy servant. Glory be to Thee for ever'.... And after ye are filled, give thanks thus, etc.

(Chs. ix and x; trans. C. Bigg.)

This account is very interesting, because it makes it clear that long after St Paul's day the Church continued to combine worship and social intercourse in a way that a more sophisticated age would find embarrassing. Here was a genuine meal, and no doubt it was enjoyed; but with the meal was combined a sacrament, and the elements of bread and wine were made symbolic of Christian faith and aspiration.² Like St Paul, the author of the *Didache* feels that a peculiar sacredness attaches to the elements, 'Let

¹ Not murdered children, as was commonly reported.

² Curiously enough there is no reference to the death of Christ, nor to the words 'This is my Body'. The cup symbolizes the vine of David, and the bread symbolizes both the Church and the spiritual food of God's revelation. There is no mention of a presiding minister, though he is not excluded. Note that the cup comes before the bread, as in Lk. xxii, 17 ff.

none eat or drink of your Eucharist, but they that are baptized into the name of the Lord; for as touching this the Lord hath said, Give not that which is holy to the dogs'.

This reverence felt for the bread and wine is emphasized, and in some degree explained, by Justin Martyr, who gives an account of the Christian supper as he knew it at Rome about 150.

On the day called Sunday all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then when the reader has ceased the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president offers prayers and thanksgivings according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen, and there is a distribution, and a participation of the Eucharistic elements, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the hands of the Deacons. (1 *Apol.* LXVII.)

In an earlier passage Justin writes:

For we do not receive these as common bread and common drink. But, just as Jesus Christ our Saviour, when made flesh by the Word (Logos) of God, had both flesh and blood on behalf of our salvation, so too we were taught that the food over which thanks have been given, by prayer of the word which comes from him (from which our blood and flesh are fed by a process of change) is both the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh.¹

And he goes on to quote the words of institution from 'the memoirs of the apostles'.

¹ We give the translation which appears in Dr Bethune-Baker's *Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine*, p. 389, where see his note in the second edition. The obscurity of the passage perhaps indicates the vagueness of Christian thought on this subject in early times.

Comparing this account with that of the *Didache* we are struck with the change of emphasis. There is still a meal, and Justin says that after the meal the business of the community is transacted; but the purely religious element predominates, and there is something like a definite order of service—scripture reading, sermon, prayers, and eucharistic meal, all under control of the 'President'. The actual elements are revered as being in some sense the Body and Blood of Christ, and the whole ceremony is performed in conscious obedience to the words 'This do in remembrance of me'.

It seems that at the time of Justin no separation had been made between the Christians' social gathering and the Eucharist, but before the end of the second century it had become customary to hold them at different times. The Eucharist was celebrated in the early morning, and became purely devotional, a ritual meal rather than a genuine repast.¹ Probably the change was inevitable, and on the whole it may have been for the best; but the Church lost much by separating devotion from social intercourse. The tendency was encouraged to make 'religion' something apart from the ordinary affairs of life, and whereas 'going to church' and having a dinner party had once been closely associated, henceforth they came to represent quite separate and perhaps contrasted activities. The Eucharist became more and more 'sacred', and the supper-party more and more 'secular', until it finally degenerated into a dole of food provided by the rich and consumed by the

¹ 'We take in meetings before daybreak, and from the hands of none but the presidents, the sacrament of the Eucharist, which the Lord both commanded to be eaten at meal times, and enjoined to be taken by all.' (Tert. *de Corona* 3. He is justifying respect for tradition.)

poor. If for the last eighteen centuries Christians had combined their devotions with their dinner-parties, how different history would have been!¹

Even severed from the Eucharist, the Agape, as it was called, continued to be celebrated. Tertullian describes it as held in Africa in his day.

About the modest supper-room of the Christians alone a great ado is made. Our feast explains itself by its name. The Greeks call it 'love' (agape). Whatever it costs, our outlay in the name of piety is gain, since with the good things of the feast we benefit the needy.... A peculiar respect is shewn to the lowly. If the object of our feast is good, in the light of that consider its further regulations. As it is an act of religious service, it permits no vileness nor immodesty. The participants before reclining² taste first of prayer to God. As much is eaten as satisfies the cravings of hunger; as much is drunk as befits the chaste. They say it is enough, as those who remember that even during the night they have to worship God. They talk as those who know that the Lord is one of their listeners. After washing their hands, and when the lights are brought in, each is asked to stand forth and sing as he can a hymn to God, either one from the holy scriptures, or one of his own composing—a proof of the measure of our drinking! As the feast began with prayer, so with prayer it is closed. (*Apol. xxxix.*)

The Agape lingered in some places until the sixth century, but from the end of the second century its importance rapidly diminished. The increasing numbers of the Christians must have made its organization difficult if not impossible, and the tendency for groups and classes to meet separately was irresistible. Thus Clement of Alexandria, writing a few years later than Tertullian, complains that the rich hold sumptuous banquets which they dare to call Agapae, though only those who can afford such feasts are

¹ Cf. 1 Cor. xi, 25. 'This do as oft as ye shall drink it in remembrance of me.'

² I.e. 'lying down' to dinner.

invited, and the poor hold their modest suppers apart. In the fourth century St Ambrose endeavoured to put a stop to the Agape on account of abuses which had crept in, and a council in the sixth century forbade it to be held in church. It was one of many Christian observances which were more easily maintained when the Church was small and obscure; when the Christians in a city might number tens of thousands it became impossible.

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CHAPTER FIVE

LIFE IN THE EARLY CHURCH. II

THE Sunday meetings of the early Christians had very great importance, for by gathering together the members of the Church expressed their corporate spirit and stimulated their devotion; but neither in the second century nor in the twentieth can the Christian life be lived in church, and we must now study the effect of conversion to Christianity on the daily life of the Church's members.

There is an obvious distinction to be drawn between those who had been converted from Judaism, and those who had been heathen before they joined the Christian Church. Judaism was a strongly moral religion which taught self-control, purity of life, kindness to the poor, truthfulness, and indeed most of the virtues that we call 'Christian'.¹ Hence the change which the converted Jew had to face was a change which affected his theology and his place in society rather than his moral principles and his manner of life. In the very early days the Jewish Christian regarded himself as still a member of the Jewish Church, and was only distinguished from other Jews by his reverence for Jesus as the Messiah. That stage soon passed; before the end of the first century the Church and the Synagogue were in opposite camps, and then the Jew who became a Christian was regarded by his fellows as a traitor and a heretic. This was the cause of most of the early persecutions, as we see both in the Acts of the Apostles

¹ Though not always from the best motives; some Jewish books seem to emphasize unduly the fact that honesty is the best policy.

and later in the story of the martyrdom of Polycarp in 155.¹ The anti-Christian feeling of most of the Jews must have made the life of a convert from Judaism a very unhappy one; he had to face the loss of 'house, brethren, sisters, father, mother, children, lands, for my sake', and not infrequently his life was in danger. But he found a new companionship in the society of his fellow-Christians,² and he possessed an undoubted advantage over converts from heathenism in his early training in the Jewish moral law.

Yet even the Jew had much to learn in the wider atmosphere of the Christian Church as it developed its own ethics and its own organization. Corporate feeling was even stronger among the Christians than in the synagogue. If a man was sick, other Christians visited him and provided for his needs. If he was in want, he was relieved out of the common fund. If he was arrested and imprisoned, even in prison he was not forgotten,³ and many a Christian lost his life by thus bravely shewing sympathy with the confessors, as those who were imprisoned on the charge of being Christians were called.

The heathen writer Lucian, in his satirical account of the death of Peregrinus, thus refers to the martyrdom of Ignatius :

When Peregrinus was imprisoned, the Christians, taking the matter to heart, left no stone unturned in the endeavour to rescue him. Then, when this was found impossible, they looked

¹ Polycarp was bishop of Smyrna. The vivid story of his martyrdom which survives makes it clear that the Jews were behind the anti-Christian outbreak in which he perished.

(Kidd, *Documents*, No. 36.)

² Mk. x, 29, 30. One of the many sayings in the gospels which must be read in the light of the subsequent experience of the Church. Cp. Jn. xvi, 2.

³ Mt. xxv, 36.

after his wants in every other respect with unremitting zeal and care. And from the first break of day old women ('widows' they are called) and orphan children might be seen waiting about the doors of the prison; while their officers, by bribing the keepers, succeeded in passing the night inside with him. Then various meals were brought, and sacred formulas of theirs repeated.¹

The organization of Christian charity was one of the most remarkable achievements of the early Church. We read in *Acts* of the provision made for widows in 'the daily ministration', and in the *Pastoral Epistles* 'widows' appear as a definite class supported by the charity of the local church. Orphans too were not forgotten, and the Christians rescued and brought up many unwanted children who had been cast out to die ('exposed') by their heathen parents. Nor was the charity of the faithful limited to local needs. St Paul collected from the churches of Macedonia and Achaia for the relief of the poor Christians of Jerusalem; and his action, however it may have benefited the Judaeans, certainly taught the Gentile Christians a valuable lesson in the responsibilities of churchmanship. The churches developed a system of 'commendation' by which a travelling Christian was assured of a hospitable reception in the various cities through which he might pass on his journey.²

One manifestation of the Christian spirit which astonished the heathen was the care of the sick. We are so accustomed to the existence of hospitals, that we can hardly imagine a state of society in which there was practically no provision for the victims of accident and disease.

¹ Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, II, i, 345.

² The system needed very careful safeguarding. The *Didache* insists that a travelling prophet must not stay more than a day or two, and others must work for their living and not be dependent on their hosts for more than a very short time. St Paul mentions the 'letters of commendation' which a Christian carried as a guarantee of his character. (2 Cor. iii, 1.)

In the Roman Empire the sick were dependent on the attentions of their relatives, and when their sickness was known to be contagious they were often deserted and left to die unattended. The Christians not only nursed their own sick folk with tender care, but in many cases they shewed scarcely less solicitude for their heathen neighbours. Dionysius of Alexandria describes their behaviour in the great plague which decimated the city during his episcopate :

Most of our brethren, by their exceeding great love and brotherly affection, not sparing themselves, and adhering to one-another, were constantly tending the sick, ministering to their wants without cessation, and, healing them in Christ, have departed most sweetly with them.... Many who had healed and strengthened others themselves died.... The best of our brethren indeed have departed this life in this way. Among the heathen it was just the opposite. They repelled those that began to be sick, and avoided their dearest friends. They would cast them out into the roads half dead, or throw them out when dead without burial.

(Euseb. *H.E.* vii, 22.)

In the fourth and fifth centuries Alexandria had its 'reckless servants of Christ', or 'parabolani', and in Cappadocia St Basil organized what was perhaps the first Christian hospital for the sick and poor, employing the monks in attending to the patients.

Much of this would be new even to a convert from Judaism, but a convert from heathenism found himself in a moral atmosphere which was altogether strange. It is broadly true that heathenism never presented any moral requirements as religious duties, and although some philosophers might give much good advice, their sermons were addressed only to the few. When a heathen accepted baptism, or rather when he became a candidate for baptism, he often made his first acquaintance with moral discipline,

and for the first time he was confronted with a definite moral ideal.

In the first place, he must turn away from the abominations which were commonly accepted in heathen society. Thus, to quote the *Didache*:

Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery.... Thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not deal in magic, thou shalt do no sorcery, thou shalt not murder a child, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not speak evil, thou shalt not cherish a grudge, thou shalt not be double-minded nor double-tongued. Thy word shall not be false or empty, but fulfilled by action. Thou shalt not be avaricious, nor a plunderer, nor a hypocrite, nor ill-tempered, nor proud. Thou shalt not plan evil against thy neighbour. Thou shalt not hate any man, but some thou shalt reprove, and for others thou shalt pray, and others again thou shalt love more than thy life.

Such demands were not easy to one who had been brought up and who still had to live in the midst of heathen society. Idolatry presented a great problem, because the ramifications of idol-worship were widespread. The Christian could not accept an invitation to dinner because the meat placed before him would almost certainly have been offered to some god, and thus, in his view, dedicated to devils. He could not go to the theatre because the show presented would be both idolatrous and obscene. For the same reason the arena was forbidden. Many trades were connected directly or indirectly with idolatry, and the Christian must avoid or abandon all such occupations. It was difficult for him to serve in the army, because military discipline would require him to participate in various heathen ceremonies. His wife might still be devoted to the gods, and that would mean trouble at home; or his employer might be a heathen, and that, in the case of a slave, might

mean torture and even death if he tried to stand true to his Christian principles.

Only occasionally in the surviving literature of the early Church do we catch glimpses of the urgency of these problems, but we can sympathize with the Christians who had to face them every day. Tertullian wrote a whole book, *De Corona Militis*, on the impropriety of a Christian soldier's wearing a laurel wreath, and in another work he describes the inconveniences of mixed marriages. Suppose a Christian woman married to a heathen; to the Lord she is unable to give satisfaction, since she has a servant of the devil always at her side, for her husband is the devil's agent in hindering the pursuits and duties of believers. If a fast has to be kept, the husband makes an appointment with his wife to meet him at the baths; on a fast day the husband is sure to give a dinner party; if a charitable expedition has to be made, family duties were never more urgent. For who will suffer his wife, on the pretence of 'visiting the brethren', to go round from street to street visiting other men's houses? Who will endure her absence from his side for night assemblies? or for the all-night vigil at Easter? Who will let her go to the Lord's Supper which they defame, or creep into prison to kiss a martyr's bonds? If a pilgrim brother arrive, what hospitality for him in an alien house? If bounty is to be distributed, the husband is sure to lock the store-cupboard and keep the key.¹

We must not suppose that all the converts from heathenism accepted readily the many demands made upon them. Some gave up their new religion altogether, as we know from Pliny's letter to Trajan, in which he speaks of those who had been Christians but had ceased to be such. Others retained their connexion with the Church, but failed in

¹ *Ad Uxorem*, II, 4 (paraphrased).

various degrees to maintain its standards. Thus there arose the problem of ecclesiastical discipline. In very early days St Paul had been obliged to take strong measures against flagrant offenders,¹ and the Epistle to the Hebrews implies that serious offences were commonly punished by final expulsion from the Christian community.² This was the natural course to pursue, for if the Church was to retain its purity as the bride of the Lamb (Rev. xxi, 2, 9) no impurity in her members could be tolerated. The Church had its standards which were perfectly understood, and it seemed only just that rebels should lose their privileges. But practical difficulties soon arose. Not all offences could be treated as equally serious, and some moral failures were obviously due to human weakness rather than to any real disloyalty to Christ. It was soon recognized that there is 'a sin not unto death',³ and some means had to be devised of dealing with those who were guilty but repentant. So the officials of the local congregations became disciplinary officers. The Epistle of Clement of Rome refers to the exercise of their functions:

Ye therefore that laid the foundation of the sedition, submit yourselves unto the presbyters and receive chastisement unto repentance, bending the knees of your heart. Learn to submit yourselves.... For it is better for you to be found little in the flock of Christ, and to have your name on God's roll, than to be had in exceeding honour, and to be cast out from the hope of Him.

(Ch. 57.)

We do not know precisely what is meant by 'chastisement', but it is clear that the presbyters had power to impose upon disorderly members of the congregation some

¹ 1 Tim. i, 20, 1 Cor. v, 5. To 'deliver unto Satan' presumably means to expel from the Church, and so to expose to the attacks of the powers of evil.

² Heb. vi, 4-6.

³ 1 Jn. v, 16.

humiliation which testified to their repentance, but which did not involve their permanent exclusion from the Church.

In the second century the problem of how to deal with those who had fallen into sin was keenly debated. One of the most curious survivals of early Christian literature is *The Shepherd of Hermas*, a book which seems to have been written at Rome in the first half of the second century. It is an allegorical work consisting of sundry visions and parables in which Hermas receives divine instruction concerning the affairs of the Church. The main question is this matter of repentance, and the Shepherd after whom the book is named is 'the Angel of Repentance'. According to Hermas, from the time when he writes, God is willing to grant one repentance to His people, but after that no sin can be forgiven. This probably represents a departure from the stricter theory of the early days, but it was soon to give place to a still more liberal practice. Sins were considered to fall roughly into two categories: a few sins, such as murder, adultery, apostasy, or deliberate idolatry were considered so serious that they involved complete and final expulsion from the Church; but others were punished by exclusion from the fellowship of the congregation for limited periods. In such cases the bishop, on hearing that a Christian had been guilty of wrong-doing, would send some of the deacons to reprove him and reason with him. If they reported that he acknowledged and regretted his fault, the bishop would summon him to the church, where he would be required to make public confession. He would then be admitted to penance, after which, if his conduct was considered satisfactory, the bishop would lay his hands on him and restore him to the full rights and privileges of membership in the Church.¹ It must be remembered that

¹ For descriptions of the penitential system *vide Tert. de Poenitentia, and Apostolic Constitutions, ii, 16.* (See additional note.)

in these early days penance was regarded as a proof of repentance, and not as an expiation for the sin committed. The idea of its being a penal sentence by which sin is purged and the account 'squared' belongs to a later period.

The whole question of discipline in the Church became acute as the result of severe persecution in the third century. St Cyprian, who was bishop of Carthage about 250 during the Decian persecution, has left behind a number of letters, and from these letters and other sources we learn something of the troubles of the African Church.

The persecution was unexpected by the majority of the Christians, and a large number, threatened with imprisonment or death, denied their faith. When the persecution slackened many of them wished to return to the Church. But on what terms, if at all, could they be readmitted? Those who had stood firm were divided in their opinions. Some favoured a rigorous attitude, and declared that apostasy had always been punished by permanent exclusion from the Church. Others, and among them many of the 'confessors' who had borne imprisonment and torture for the faith, wished that their lapsed brethren should be readmitted to communion forthwith, and some of them even presumed to issue peremptory orders to the clergy to act in accordance with their wishes. Cyprian and other bishops recommended a middle policy; apostates were not to be admitted to communion on the order of confessors—that would have been fatal to episcopal authority; but they were to be admitted to penance, and after a period proportionate to the guilt of each individual, restored to the peace of the Church. Controversy on this matter was surprisingly bitter, not only in Africa, but also in many parts of the world, and not only in the days of Decius, but also in the time of Diocletian. It gave rise to at least two disastrous

schisms, Novatianism and Donatism, which disturbed and weakened the Church for centuries. The schismatics, who demanded the perpetual exclusion of apostates, displayed a hard and unloving temper; but no doubt they were genuinely concerned for the purity of the Church, and subsequent history has to some extent justified their fear lest by a relaxation of the Church's discipline her moral witness to the world might be seriously weakened.

Controversies such as these remind us that there were failures among the early Christians. Yet on the whole the Church succeeded marvellously. Not only did a handful of nobodies¹ grow into a society which could challenge and defeat the Empire, but they won triumphs which if less spectacular were even more astonishing. The Christians taught men the positive value of honesty, purity, gentleness, self-sacrifice, and love, while they exemplified in their own lives the more widely respected virtues of courage and devotion. Against some of the worst horrors of the ancient world, such as the gladiatorial shows, the murder of children, and uncontrolled cruelty to slaves, the Christians created a public opinion which led at last to reform. The Church did not lead a frontal attack on abuses. For instance, it did not demand that all slaves should be liberated; but it gave to Christian slaves a new hope and a self-respect which made their lives tolerable, and it taught owners to regard their slaves as brethren in Christ for whom they too were accountable to their common Master. No doubt these lessons were learned imperfectly, and after the great inrush of the heathen into the Church in the fourth century they were in danger of being forgotten altogether; yet we have no reason to doubt that the Apologists used a good argument when they maintained that the changed lives of most of the Christians was the best proof of the truth of

¹ 1 Cor. i, 26.

their creed. At any rate it was the argument which convinced the world.

However much the convert to Christianity had to give up of his old life and habits, the compensations were more than equal. Not only did membership in the Church carry with it very solid advantages, particularly to the poor, but the Christians were animated by a new spirit which made for happiness. They had a feeling of security vastly different from the timidity of the heathen in the face of unknown and capricious spiritual powers. Christians still believed in the omnipresence of the spirits of evil, but they also believed that demons were powerless against the servants of Christ. They were inspired by a strong hope which made even death an event to be welcomed. This accounts for the smiles and laughter with which Perpetua and many other martyrs met their fate. They were filled with a spirit of love and loyalty to Christ which made the service of GOD a life of joyous freedom. 'Eighty and six years', said Polycarp, 'have I been His servant, and He hath done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?' And lastly, the best of the Christians felt a simple delight in goodness and the consciousness that their lives were pleasing to GOD. 'When thou hast attained to this full knowledge', says the letter to Diognetus, 'with what joy thinkest thou that thou wilt be filled, or how wilt thou love Him that so loved thee before? And loving Him, thou wilt be an imitator of His goodness.' Something of the kind St Paul meant when he spoke of 'all the full assurance of understanding' (Col. ii. 2).

ADDITIONAL NOTE ON PENANCE

Penance always involved refusal of the Holy Communion for a period, and some degree of fasting was required from the penitent. For the early period we have few details.

Tertullian, who is always severe, describes 'exomologesis' (public acknowledgement of guilt) as 'a discipline for the humiliation of man, enjoining such conversation as inviteth to mercy; it is directed also even in the matter of dress and food—to lie in sackcloth and ashes, to hide his body in filthy garments, to cast down his spirit with mourning, to exchange for severe treatment the sins which he has committed; for the rest to use simple things for meat and drink; for the most part to cherish prayer by fasts, to groan, to weep, and to moan day and night unto the Lord his GOD; to throw himself upon the ground before the presbyters, and to fall on his knees before the beloved of GOD; to enjoin all the brethren to bear the message of his prayer for mercy' (*de Poenit.* ch. 9). This sounds like an exaggerated account.

The penitential system was greatly elaborated in the fourth century, particularly in the East. There were four stages, or 'stations', through which the penitent had to pass. In the first he was excluded altogether from the Christian assembly, in the second he was allowed to stand just inside the door, in the third he was admitted to the body of the church, but no further than the catechumens, and in the fourth he stood among the faithful, but was dismissed before the most sacred part of the service began.

Up to the middle of the third century the duration of penance did not exceed a few months. In later times penances of fifteen years were imposed for serious offences.

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CHAPTER SIX

THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH'S CREED. I

THE history of the growth of Christian theology is of great interest, although in many directions it is obscure. Here we can attempt no more than to indicate some of the influences which were at work in the first few centuries, and to notice some of their effects.

Christianity was an offshoot of the religion of the Jews, and we should expect to find the foundations of Christianity in the Old Testament, the sacred literature of the Jews. If the first Christians had been Greeks and not Jews, they might not have taken for granted such truths as the unity of God who created the Heavens and the Earth, or His character as a God of righteousness, or the fact of His self-revelation in the past, or the control of history by His will and purpose. As Jews, the Christians had been brought up to believe these things, and when they met Greeks who were disposed to question some of them, they were greatly shocked and astonished.

The Jewish antecedents of the early Christians resulted in their having a sure foundation on which to build their distinctive theology. There were some things on which they differed from other Jews, but in this they agreed, they believed in one God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth.

The real difficulty for the Christians began when they tried to give expression to their devotion to Christ. As we have seen in an earlier volume of this series, what originally distinguished the Christians from other Jews was their conviction that Jesus was the Messiah, the Anointed One,

the Christ whom God would send to intervene in human affairs and establish His Kingdom. This belief was unacceptable to the majority of the Jews for various reasons, chiefly because Jesus was not the kind of Messiah whom those who treasured messianic hopes were expecting. St Paul says that the Cross was to the Jews a cause of stumbling; they considered the idea that God would allow His Christ to be crucified like a criminal an absurdity.

So the first task which confronted the Christians was to shew that their faith in Jesus as Christ was not so absurd as it seemed, and they defended their belief mainly on two grounds. Firstly, they argued that the death of the Christ had been prophesied in Holy Scripture, and therefore belonged to the eternal purpose of God; and secondly, they proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, of which they themselves were witnesses, as proving that God had vindicated His claim to be the Messiah. These arguments, presented with burning zeal and unmistakable conviction, carried weight, and the Apostles and their followers made many converts in Jerusalem and elsewhere.

But clearly there was more thinking to be done. Granted that the crucifixion was in accordance with God's eternal purpose, the question still remained why it should have been necessary. Before long the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah was remembered with its mysterious reference to one who 'was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him and with his stripes we are healed'. Here surely was the explanation of the death of Christ. By His death He had won salvation for mankind, and as the Saviour and Judge of men He would rule in the coming Kingdom.

It was St Paul who elaborated this doctrine, and he brought to bear upon its exposition not only the power of

an acute and deeply religious mind, but also many ideas about GOD and the character of His dealings with men which he owed to his Jewish and Pharisaic upbringing. For that reason his epistles contain 'some things hard to be understood', as the author of 2 Peter puts it. But the main outline of his teaching is clear enough. Jesus was not only the Messiah, He was GOD's Son. He died voluntarily on the cross to save men from the consequences of sin, and to make it possible for sinners to enjoy again a right relationship with GOD. Perhaps too much attention has been paid to those passages in St Paul's epistles in which he labours to shew exactly how this redemption was won, for they are of less importance than others in which he merely proclaims the fact as founded on his own experience. St. Paul had been a Jew, scrupulous in keeping the law, and yet a sinner; now through faith in Christ crucified he knew that he was a new man, saved from sin, and living at peace with GOD. If Christ had not died it could not have been so; therefore Christ by His death had won for him salvation.

As the Church spread among the Gentiles the crucifixion became a less urgent problem, because to the Greeks the word 'Christ' had none of the associations it bore among the Jews, and very soon it was used simply as a proper name. The crucifixion of Jesus was in keeping with the present experience of His followers. The Jews were the worst enemies of the Church, and what more natural than that their malice should have led them to crucify the Son of GOD? So Gentile converts were less disposed to speculate on the mystery of the death of Christ, and St Paul's doctrine of the Atonement was suffered to fall into the background for some centuries. It has been said that St Augustine rediscovered St Paul.

The Greek world was more interested in the interpreta-

tion of the Person of Christ, and in determining what early believers had meant when they called Him 'Son of GOD'. In this connexion it must be remembered that 'son' is a word of somewhat vague significance. Among Semitic peoples 'sonship' is loosely used to describe moral rather than physical relationship. Thus, 'a child of Belial' means a bad man; a 'son of peace' is a peaceful person; a 'son of man' is a human being. In the same way a 'son of GOD' means one who partakes in some measure of the nature and character of the Diety, but the phrase is metaphorical rather than metaphysical, and must not be pressed too far. Even when very early Jewish believers called Jesus *the Son of God* they did not necessarily mean more than that He exhibited divine characteristics in a unique degree. Greeks had other ideas, and they gave to sonship a much more physical sense. To a Greek the statement that Christ was Son of God would suggest at once that He derived His being from God, who, in some supersensual way, was His Father. Among the Jews sonship did not necessarily imply paternity, whereas among the Greeks it did.

Ideas concerning God differed no less widely. We must distinguish between the ordinary uninstructed heathen and the philosophers. The former had notions of divinity which were crude and childish; while the latter refined the idea until to the ordinary man there seemed to be nothing left. Most philosophers, if they had anything at all to teach about God, taught that He is far removed from any contact with matter. He exists, but so unlike is He to anything we can conceive, that He is best described by the negation of all human attributes. In particular, feeling and emotion, change and development are unthinkable with reference to God. He is Being—indescribable, unchangeable, and ineffable.

In a world which displayed so much diversity of outlook the divine sonship of Christ was sure to be variously interpreted. (Simple folk would be inclined to think that Jesus was GOD's Son because GOD, and not Joseph, was His Father.) But no theologian would be content with such a theory; the sonship of Christ must be an eternal relationship expressive of the fact that His nature was essentially divine, and then the problem arose as to how One who shared the divine nature could live as man and even suffer pain and death.

We know just enough of Christian thought in the second century to realize that these differences of outlook lay behind several quite different explanations of the divinity of Christ. There were some Christians who had been brought up amid Jewish surroundings who thought of Jesus as a man on whom the Spirit of GOD descended, and so He was adopted as GOD's Son. The lost Gospel according to the Hebrews probably expressed this view, and in its elaborate description of the baptism of Christ associated His adoption as GOD's Son with that important event. Those who thought thus must have rejected the authority of St Paul, for the Apostle teaches the pre-existence of the Son (Phil. ii, 5-11); but we know that many were not prepared to follow St Paul, and by some Christians of his own race he was regarded as a heretic. These Jewish Christians had a theology that was not likely to appeal to the Gentile world, and their numbers gradually dwindled until they were swamped in the ever-growing Gentile Church.

The Gentiles were by no means agreed among themselves. Even in the first century there were some who felt so acutely the difficulty of ascribing human experiences to One who was GOD that they represented the earthly life of Jesus as wholly unreal. He had been born of Mary, but

His body was only an appearance, and He had experienced none of the needs and felt none of the passions which are common to men. The crucifixion was variously explained; some said that Simon of Cyrene was crucified by mistake instead of Jesus; others that though His body hung on the cross He Himself felt nothing; and some made a subtle distinction between the man Jesus who suffered, and the divine Christ who had already ascended to Heaven. Theories of this kind are known as Docetic, from a Greek word meaning 'to seem'; and we may judge from the Gospel and Epistles of St John that they had already become common before the end of the first century. In the second century they were freely adopted by many schools of heretics who tried unsuccessfully to reconcile Christian truths with elaborate systems of philosophy.

It is in the movement, or movements, classed together under the title of 'Gnosticism' that we see the first effect on philosophical heathenism of the preaching of the divinity of Christ, and of the incarnation of the Son of God. The pursuit of 'gnosis' (esoteric knowledge) was widespread in the second century, and among the Christians the word 'Gnostic' ('a knowing one') was used by certain teachers and their followers to express their belief that they possessed a 'knowledge' which was revealed to them though not to the general run of Christians. The Gnostics were philosophers who claimed to be able to give a general account of the world, how it came into being, how it would end, and how man was related to GOD. The various schools of Gnostics differed in the details of their systems, but in one respect they were all agreed; they all regarded the material world as more or less evil, and they considered human life, which is lived in the world of matter, to be a misfortune. We need not stay to enquire whence they derived this

gloomy theory, so different from the teaching of the Bible that 'God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good'; but it is obvious that the conviction that evil is inherent in matter would not combine easily with the Christian belief in one God who made the world. So the Gnostics denied either that God is one, or that He made the world. Some said that there are two Gods, one good and one evil, and that the visible world is the creation of the evil god. Others allowed that there is only one supreme God, but denied that He had any part in the creation of matter. The world, they said, came into being through an accident, and subordinate spiritual powers were immediately responsible. Others again were disposed to deny that the world of matter had any real existence, and taught that the visible world belongs only to the sphere of emptiness and delusion. In any case it was obvious on the Gnostic premises that man, in so far as he was a spiritual being, could find no true home in this world, and his ambition must be to free himself from the contamination of matter by a life lived on the plane of pure spirit.

Philosophies of this type have been known from a very early age, and they are still common in the East. We should have had no reason to notice them if the Gnostics had not endeavoured to combine such ideas with a respect for Christ regarded as in some sense the Saviour of men. The result of this endeavour, though fantastic in detail, was in general very much what we should expect. The Gnostics represented Christ as a wholly spiritual Being, the immediate creation of the supreme God, and having nothing whatever in common with the world of matter which is the kingdom of evil. The body of Christ appeared to be real, but was in fact only an appearance. By teaching the truth He led men back into the realm of the spirit, and those

men responded who are by nature spiritual. There is no hope for the carnally-minded man who belongs to the earth and in the earth must remain, but most of the Gnostics allowed the ordinary man to be partly spiritual and capable of some religious progress. The final consummation will be reached when the work of creation is undone and spirit and matter are again separated into two kingdoms with no connexion or communication between them.

The Gnostics were not much interested in questions of morality; to them truth rather than goodness seemed supremely important, and they thought of Christ as saving man from ignorance rather than redeeming him from sin. Most of them represented the ideal of life to be the practice of rigid asceticism whereby the soul could be freed from earth-born passions. A few went to the other extreme, and under the pretence that the soul is too pure to be soiled by the flesh they practised the grossest self-indulgence.

Gnosticism was for a time popular, and became a serious danger to the Church. It reflected common tendencies of thought—such as the belief that matter is contemptible, and that the ascetic life is the best—and the Church had not as yet established standards of orthodoxy. The very name was an attraction to those who liked to think themselves cleverer than their neighbours. In the end Gnosticism was rejected because it was proved to be inconsistent with traditions of early days and incompatible with the teaching of the Apostles as reflected in their surviving writings.

But although the positive tenets of the Gnostics were branded as heretical, the movement was not without its effect within the Church. It stimulated intellectual enquiry, and led others whose ideas were less foreign to traditional Christianity to give their beliefs formal expression. Thus Irenaeus, who was bishop of Lyons

in Gaul towards the end of the second century, in opposing the Gnostics did much to help the development of Christian theology, and his five books against heresies are a Christian classic. At Alexandria there was a famous school for training of catechumens, and some of its heads were not ashamed to call themselves Gnostics, though they avoided the more objectionable views of the heretics. Chief among these Alexandrians were Clement, who taught in the last decade of the second century, and his pupil Origen, one of the most learned Christians who ever lived. Only a few of Clement's writings have survived, but they enable us to see that in him the Church had a teacher who could meet heathen and Gnostic philosophers on their own ground, and could present the faith of the Church in such terms as would command the attention of the learned. Like the Gnostics, these Alexandrians thought chiefly of Christ as a divine Being sent to reveal the truth to men, and so to confer upon them the liberating blessings of knowledge; but unlike many of the heretics they insisted that there can be no salvation without moral goodness, and that the promises of GOD are made to all men, and not to a learned few.

Origen was a greater man than Clement, though, long after his death, some of his views were condemned as unorthodox. His life was wholly devoted to the pursuit of learning. He lost his father in the persecution of 202, and for a time, though he was only a boy of seventeen, he contrived by teaching grammar to support his mother and six brothers. Soon afterwards the bishop, Demetrius, made him head of the catechetical school. He sold the classical library he had collected and devoted himself heart and soul to his work as a Christian teacher. Origen's energy was astonishing. He spent most of the day teaching, and most of the

night studying, with only a few hours snatched for sleep on the bare ground. He attended the lectures of Ammonius Saccas, a celebrated philosopher, in order to keep abreast with the times. He learnt Hebrew, in order that he might better understand the Old Testament, and very soon he began to publish the first of the enormous number of books (Epiphanius says 6000) which flowed from his pen.

After twenty-five years at Alexandria, Origen moved to Caesarea, driven out of his native city by the ill-will of Bishop Demetrius, and there, until his arrest in the Decian persecution, he continued his scholarly labours, studying scripture, writing commentaries, preaching and teaching. There is no denying the greatness of his services to Christian theology. It was he who first brought distinctively Christian beliefs into relation with a comprehensive philosophy of life, and so made it possible for a man to be a Christian and a learned philosopher at the same time.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH'S CREED. II

WE have dwelt at some length upon the controversy with the Gnostics in order to illustrate the position of the Church during the first few centuries of its history. The Christians had from the first certain distinctive beliefs, such as belief in one GOD, and in Jesus Christ His Son, by whom He would judge the world, and in the Holy Spirit who dwelt in all Christ's people. But early Christian doctrine was no complete philosophy or fixed system of beliefs, and individual converts combined what they learnt in the Church with other ideas derived from various sources —such as Judaism, Greek philosophy, heathen religion, the mysteries, or popular superstition. Two results followed. In the first place, owing to the constant absorption of ideas derived from without the Church, Christian doctrine was a gradual growth; and in the second place, there existed from the first different types of Christian theology. It is easy to see that the Fourth Gospel presents a different view of the Person of Christ from that reflected in St Mark; the Epistle of St James is very unlike the Epistles of St Paul; and if we only had the Book of Revelation in our New Testament we should hardly suspect that Christian theology was ever what it appears in the Epistle to the Hebrews. These theologies are not necessarily inconsistent, but they represent different points of view such as would come naturally to men of different temperament and different education. When the Church spread over the world divergences tended to become more acute, and for

a long time the unity of the Church was seriously threatened. It is one of the miracles of history that in the second century the Christians did not split up into a number of little sects rapidly diverging from one another in faith and practice. In actual fact a few heretics with their disciples did separate, but their numbers were not great, and the majority of Christians, despite their divergences, retained a consciousness of unity in one great body, 'the Catholic Church'.¹

This was due to several causes. Firstly, it was due to the influence of the apostolic writings, which were being collected and canonized as forming a sacred literature of the New Covenant (or Testament), having no less authority than the sacred literature of the Old. These books set a standard by which all theories and practices must be judged, and by reference to them the more extravagant suggestions of the heretics were ruled out of court. Moreover, some of the New Testament scriptures, notably the Epistles of St Paul, taught a view of the Church as essentially one, the Body of Christ, and so the student of Scripture had an ideal of unity constantly before him. He concluded that it had been the intention of the Lord and His Apostles that the Church should be one, and therefore that unity ought to be maintained. Secondly, the unity of the Church was safeguarded by the efficient organization of the local congregations. We have already seen how Ignatius valued government by the clergy, and especially by the bishop, as preventing schism and disorder; and there can be no doubt that the acceptance of episcopal authority was a great factor in the development of a sense of unity among Christians of various types and classes. But even episcopacy in its

¹ The phrase 'the Catholic Church' first appears in Ignatius.

early form would not have preserved the unity of the Church as a whole if it had not been for the excellent communications which the world owed to Roman rule. This third factor was most important in preventing local congregations from attaining too much independence and developing eccentricities unknown in other churches. Christian travellers were continually passing along the Roman roads, and in every city they were sure of a welcome from their Christian brethren. If they stayed a few days they would attend the meetings of the Church, join in the services, and take part in discussions of Christian doctrine. In this way local peculiarities would soon be noticed, and a world-wide uniformity would be promoted.

In this connexion it is important to observe the influence of the churches in great cities such as Rome, Corinth, Ephesus and Antioch. These churches had been founded by Apostles, or at least Apostles had visited them in early days; it was therefore assumed, and not without reason, that their traditions contained the essentials of the apostolic teaching, and innovators who wished to introduce strange ideas as part of Christian doctrine had to explain why such notions were unknown in the churches which had received the Gospel from the immediate followers of the Lord. We hear of one enquiring Christian in the middle of the second century, Hegesippus by name, who made a tour of the most ancient churches with the express object of comparing the doctrine taught in each.

So on the whole unity was maintained, and progress was fairly uniform throughout the world. Yet divisions were not altogether avoided. For instance, customs differed in different parts of the world with regard to the keeping of

Easter. The churches of Asia were accustomed to observe the festival on the 14th of the month Nisan, irrespective of the day of the week, and they claimed the authority of St John in support of their custom. Other churches kept Easter always on a Sunday. The divergence was inconvenient, for a traveller might keep two Easters in the same year. So several attempts were made to settle the question. The aged Polycarp was so much troubled by the dispute that he travelled from Smyrna to Rome to discuss the matter with Anicetus, the Roman bishop. The discussion was friendly, but no agreement was reached. A few years later another bishop of Rome (Victor, c. 193–202) actually threatened to break off communion with the Asiatic churches unless they brought their practice into conformity with that of the West. His action provoked a storm of protest and his threat was not fulfilled. The Quarto-deciman controversy, as it was called, continued for more than a hundred years, until the Council of Nicaea (325) decided that the custom of Rome and of most other churches should prevail.

From the middle of the third century councils of bishops met not infrequently with the object of deciding matters on which there were differences of opinion. Such councils could not be held in times of persecution, but a few met in the peaceful intervals in the third century, and after the Edict of Milan 'innumerable councils were held'. It was by such gatherings, attended sometimes by four or five hundred bishops, that standards of orthodoxy were finally established. Points at issue were debated for days, sometimes for weeks, and the opinion of the majority¹ was embodied in a carefully drafted statement, which, if the

¹ In theory decisions were unanimous. Dissentients were generally deposed and excommunicated.

Council was considered truly representative, became an authoritative expression of the Christian Faith.¹

This brings us to the subject of creeds, as short summaries of Christian beliefs are generally called. The earliest creeds were brief confessions of faith made by candidates for baptism before they went down into the water. Something of the kind must have been needed from the first, for no man could be admitted to the Christian fellowship until he accepted the Christian position, and that could only be ascertained by his own confession. At first probably a number of questions were addressed to the candidate: 'Dost thou believe in God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth?' followed by the response, 'I believe'; 'Dost thou believe in Christ Jesus His Son our Lord?', and again, 'I believe'. But it was more convenient to prepare a short summary of belief which the candidate could learn by heart, in which he could be instructed, and which he could recite; so the interrogatory form was soon replaced.²

We have very little definite information concerning the earliest creeds, because they were considered too sacred to be committed to writing, and we can only try to reconstruct the early 'rules of faith' as they are called from chance references in such writers as Justin Martyr and Tertullian; and even then it is not certain whether the writers have in mind a creed strictly so-called, or only commonly accepted teaching. When credal formularies do appear they differ in different churches, but it is evident

¹ 'It is recognized by all theologians that the decisions of a General Council cannot obtain full authority by the action of the Council alone. 'They must be accepted by the Church.' (Headlam, *Doctrine of the Church and Reunion*, p. 232.)

² A few examples of the interrogatory form survive quite late; e.g. Pseudo-Ambrose ii, 7, and it is still used in the baptismal service of the Church of England.

that they were all constructed on the framework of the baptismal formulary of Matt. xxviii, 19. Naturally enough, the summary of Christian beliefs was appended to the mention of the Holy Trinity in whose name the candidate was baptized. A few examples must suffice. Irenaeus, writing about 180, says:

The Church believes in one God, Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth and the sea and all things that are in them:

And in one Jesus Christ the Son of God, who was made flesh for our salvation:

And in a Holy Spirit who proclaimed by the prophets the dispensations, and the comings of Christ, and the birth from a Virgin, and the suffering, and the rising from the dead, and the bodily ascension into the heavens of the beloved Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Bk. 1, 10.)

In the previous chapter Irenaeus had spoken of 'him who retains unchangeable in his heart the rule of the truth which he received by means of baptism', and we may safely assume that 'what the Church believes' in the above passage is a summary of that rule.

A few years later Tertullian describes baptism:

When we are going to enter the water, but a little before, in the presence of the congregation, and under the hand of the president, we solemnly profess that we disown the devil and his pomp and his angels. Then we are thrice immersed, answering somewhat more fully than the Lord appointed in the gospel.

(*de Cor.* 3.)

When entering the water we profess the Christian faith in the words of its rule (*lex*). (de *Spect.* 4.)

Granted that in days gone by there was salvation by means of bare faith before the passion and resurrection of the Lord. But now that faith has been enlarged, and has become a faith which believes in His nativity, passion, and resurrection; there has been an amplification added to the sacrament. (de *Bapt.* 13.)

We need not pursue the interesting question as to what clauses stood in the baptismal professions of Irenaeus and

Tertullian; enough has been said to illustrate the origin of creeds in the professions made by candidates for baptism, and the variety which was to be found in the different churches. It is not until late in the fourth century that we have a baptismal creed quoted in full by any Christian writer: then Epiphanius quotes a creed professed by a certain Marcellus, bishop of Ancyra, about 341. It has been shewn to be the creed of the Church of Rome, and it runs thus:

I believe in God Almighty:

And in Christ Jesus, His only begotten Son, our Lord; Who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, Who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and buried, and on the third day rose from the dead, went up into Heaven, and sat down on the right hand of the Father, whence He cometh to judge quick and dead:
And in the Holy Spirit, holy Church, remission of sins, resurrection of the flesh.

Rufinus, a Latin writer of about 400, gives us the creed of the Church as he knew it, and it is almost exactly the same. Here probably we see the origin of what we call the Apostles' Creed, which is thus derived from the baptismal creed of the Church of Rome. Throughout the second, third, and fourth centuries it was slowly taking shape, and with some modifications it has come down to our own time.¹ The legend that the creed was written by the Apostles, though believed in the fourth century, has nothing to commend it.

The baptismal creeds served their purpose as summaries of beliefs for the unlearned, but it soon became evident that they were not equally suited to meet all the needs of the Church. So in the fourth century we find other creeds of quite a different type, more elaborate statements of the

¹ The Apostles' Creed exactly as we know it first appears in Pirminius, a Frankish bishop of the eighth century.

faith intended to be used, not by unlettered candidates for baptism, but by instructed Christians. Most of these creeds, although sometimes founded on the baptismal professions of local churches, were drawn up in their final form by councils of bishops after careful discussion of disputed points. Thus, to take the most famous example, in 325 the Emperor Constantine summoned the first Oecumenical Council to meet at Nicaea in Bithynia. The main business of the Council was to debate rival views as to the divinity of Christ which had recently been put forth by Alexander bishop of Alexandria, and by Arius, one of his presbyters. Arius thought that the bishop did not sufficiently distinguish between the Father and the Son, and for his own part he taught that the Logos, or Word of GOD, incarnate in Christ, was created out of nothing by the Father, and was therefore divine in an inferior sense.

The views of Arius did not commend themselves to the assembled bishops, and it was decided to put forth in the name of the Council a creed which would definitely exclude them. Eusebius, the learned bishop of Caesarea, brought forward the baptismal creed of his own church, and that, after considerable alteration, was published as the creed of the Council of Nicaea. It ran thus:

We believe in one God the Father, Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible:

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only-begotten, that is of the substance of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, Very-God from Very-God, begotten not made, of the same substance as the Father; through whom all things were made, things in Heaven and things on earth; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, was made man, suffered, rose again on the third day, ascended into the heavens, and is coming to judge quick and dead:

And in the Holy Spirit.

The creed ended with an express denunciation of the views of Arius.

It is very strange that what we call the Nicene Creed is not the creed of the Council of Nicaea, but a similar formulary of which the origin is obscure. Our creed was not officially sanctioned by the Church until the Fourth General Council at Chalcedon in 451, when its composition was wrongly ascribed to the Second General Council held at Constantinople in 381.

In the fourth century there was a period of great confusion, with much controversy and uncertainty in matters of doctrine. Various groups of bishops put forth a number of creeds with the claim that they represented the true faith of Christendom. These creeds were all consigned to oblivion when the Arian controversy came to an end within the Empire in 381. Our creed first appears about that time, and it may have been used at the Second General Council; but it was certainly not intended to take the place of the old creed which was much revered. That it did eventually displace it is no doubt due to its greater fulness on certain points, particularly on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, concerning whose divinity controversy arose after 325. The confusion between the two creeds seems to date from the Second Council of Constantinople held in 553, which treated the later creed as though it were an improved version of the earlier—which it certainly is not, for the two were both known and used for many years.¹

It is natural that Christians when gathered together should, by reciting a creed, unite in the expression of their common faith; and so creeds came to be used in the services of the Church. Yet the evidence of their being so used

¹ It may be interesting to compare the Creed of Nicaea, as given above, with the 'Nicene Creed' in the Prayer Book.

is comparatively late. Timothy, bishop of Constantinople in 511, is said to have ordered that 'the creed should be recited at every service, whereas previously it had been used only on the Thursday before Easter, when the bishops catechized the candidates for baptism'. In this he was following a custom already established at Antioch, though only recently. From the East the custom spread to the West, and a Council at Toledo in 589 ordered the 'Creed of Constantinople' (our Nicene Creed) to be recited before the Lord's Prayer in the liturgy. But customs varied, and the Church of Rome did not adopt our Nicene Creed in the Eucharist until the time of Benedict VIII in the eleventh century. In the sixteenth century the English reformers preserved the Roman custom, and the so-called Nicene Creed still stands in the English service of Holy Communion; the simpler Apostles' Creed is used at Mattins and Evensong, having been taken over from the monastic 'hours' out of which those services were composed. The more extreme reformers always objected to the use of creeds as not obviously scriptural, and in most non-conformist chapels they are not recited in the regular services. The custom of turning to the east at the creed is modern, having been adopted in the seventeenth century. It may claim some authority from the fact that in the early Church catechumens turned to the west to renounce the devil, and to the east in professing Christ.

The Western Church has one other profession of faith, the so-called Creed of St Athanasius. It does not begin with the word 'credo', and it is not a creed in the strict sense. It is rather a canticle intended to be used by believers for their fuller instruction in the faith. It was probably composed in Gaul in the fifth century. The Prayer Book enjoins the use of the Athanasian Creed on the great

Festivals and some other Holy Days; but to many it seems unsuited to displace the Apostles' Creed, and of late years it has fallen increasingly into disuse. In the Protestant Episcopal Church of America its recitation is no longer enjoined. The Athanasian Creed can hardly be understood without a considerable knowledge of the various heresies which it was written to contradict, and many feel that such heresies may now be allowed to slumber in their graves. Certainly its dogmatic tone, no less than the difficulty of understanding its technicalities, makes it generally unpopular with a modern congregation. But it must not be forgotten that such theological formularies owe their existence, not to an ecclesiastical love of dogma, but to a belief that certain heretical errors are so damaging to the Christian Faith that they must be explicitly denied.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

MONASTICISM

ONE of the most important aspects of the early history of the Church is the rise of monasticism. Monasticism is a manifestation of an ascetic movement which is older and wider than Christianity. At the present day there are many non-Christian ascetics in the East, and in the first few centuries of our era the tendency was widespread. The Greek word 'ascesis' means discipline, or training, and was applied specially to the strict manner of life adopted by athletes in preparing for a contest. Thence it came to be used for the practices of certain philosophical sects; and finally 'ascesis' was adopted by the Church to describe the self-imposed discipline undergone by those spiritual athletes who were determined at all costs to master their unruly passions and to make the spirit supreme over the flesh.

Whenever a spiritual religion is taken seriously it must include an ascetic element, because the pursuit of spiritual things is only possible so long as the lower nature which man shares with the animals is kept under control. In the Jewish Church fasting was valued as a spiritual exercise, and one sect of the Jews, the Essenes, adopted a definitely ascetic life, avoiding as much as possible contact with the world of sense. John the Baptist was an ascetic, wearing the coarsest clothing, and eating only the simplest food. Our Lord mixed freely with men, and was even called by His enemies a 'glutton and a winebibber', but the Gospels of St Matthew and St Luke tell us that He too fasted in preparation for His ministry, and His teaching contains

many warnings against the danger of absorption in worldly affairs. St Paul says that he was accustomed to buffet his body and bring it into bondage, lest by any means after he had preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away (1 Cor. ix, 27).

Thus from the first an ascetic element was present in Christianity. It was felt that the service of GOD was so absorbing a task that other interests must be definitely subordinated, lest worldly cares should diminish the fervour of Christian discipleship.

The growth of asceticism in later times was stimulated by other and less Christian tendencies. There was abroad in the world a widespread belief that matter is evil. We have seen that within the Church this conviction found expression in the Gnostic theosophies which claimed to embody the true theology of Christianity. Many of the Gnostics gave logical expression to the current notion by teaching that the world was created by an inferior, or as some said by an evil, spirit, and not by the true GOD. If so, it was the duty of the servants of the supreme God to free themselves from all contamination by the world of matter. Only the minimum of food must be eaten to preserve life, the good things of this world must be resolutely avoided, marriage must be renounced, and we hear of one follower of the heretic Marcion who expressed his abhorrence of the works of the Creator by refusing to use water to wash his face.¹

The Church rejected the theories of the Gnostics, and retained its faith in GOD the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth; but there can be no doubt that tendencies of thought which found full and logical expression in gnosticism had a wide influence over more orthodox

¹ He licked it instead.

teachers. Asceticism was increasingly admired, not only as providing evidence of spiritual earnestness, but also as securing freedom from the manifold defilements of the world. In particular, the avoidance of marriage was generally considered essential to the cultivation of the truest holiness, and a feeling grew up that marriage was only a concession to human weakness unworthy of those, such as the clergy, who sought to be pre-eminent in religion.

Asceticism of this type must be distinguished from the scriptural asceticism which insists that first things must be put first, and that renunciation is sometimes necessary because the good is often the enemy of the best. The writers of the New Testament seek to bring all human relationships under the control of Christ;¹ and if, for instance, St Paul discountenances marriage, it is not because he thinks it a bad thing in itself, but because he fears that the married man will not have time to devote himself as he should to the pursuit of holiness.²

The monastic movement began in the middle of the third century. It had long been common for persons to devote themselves to ascetic practices, even though they continued to live in their homes and to carry on their business in the world. They ate as little as possible, and gave to prayer and meditation hours normally devoted to sleep. In some places the ascetics formed associations for mutual help and encouragement, and a few adopted a community life.

All this was very natural. The preaching of Christianity in the early days generated a heroic spirit which found

¹ E.g. Rom. xii-xiv.

² 1 Cor. vii. It must not be forgotten that St Paul expected the present order to come to an end very soon. 1 Cor. xv, 51, 1 Thess. iv, 15.

daily life in the world unsatisfying and tame. Sometimes there would be a persecution with opportunities of martyrdom, but in the long periods of peace which intervened it was difficult for glowing faith and burning enthusiasm to find expression. Life was too easy and commonplace for those who felt themselves called to take up the cross, and they longed to prove their devotion by enduring sufferings comparable with those borne by Christ and His martyrs. So voluntary hardships were willingly and joyfully undergone, and many saw the proof and measure of devotion in the intensity of such sufferings borne.

A new phase began towards the end of the third century, and it is connected with the history of St Anthony. One of the strangest books in early Christian literature is the *Life of St Antony*, written by Athanasius the celebrated bishop of Alexandria. Scholars have long disputed whether the book is a genuine work of Athanasius or not, and some of its features make it difficult to believe that Athanasius wrote it; but the evidence in its favour is strong, and the most likely view seems to be that Athanasius wrote it to please the Egyptian monks who were his friends and protectors when his life was in danger. If so, perhaps some of the incidents are not intended to be taken as serious history; they are stories told about a famous man, the hero of a credulous class, and Athanasius, though in his other writings he never mentions miracles, did not care in this connexion to be too critical.

However that may be, we have no reason to doubt the main facts of Antony's life. He was born in Egypt in the middle of the third century, and from the age of about twenty he devoted himself to the ascetic life. At first he lived at home, then he withdrew to the shelter of a tomb in the neighbourhood, later he sought complete solitude in the desert, and finally he found refuge even from his

admirers in a remote spot in the mountains overlooking the Red Sea. In the practice of austerities, if we may believe in the *Life*, Antony outdid all his predecessors, and when he died at the age of 105 he was one of the most celebrated men in the world. His example had been widely followed. Hundreds of Christian enthusiasts, determined to flee from human society, had sought refuge in the Egyptian desert, and there, in caves, and huts, and dens they sought to conquer the flesh and the devil.

We have it on ancient authority that it is not good for man to be alone, and many of the solitaries did not profit by their seclusion. Some of them went mad, and many were subject to various psychological disturbances which issued in eccentricities having little relation to Christian holiness. Even Antony found the devil at least as active in the desert as he had been in the town, and he believed himself to be constantly assaulted by demons. It was all to the good therefore when early in the fourth century a movement began for the establishment of community life among the monks. A certain Pachomius had been a soldier in the army of Constantine, and had been much impressed by the kindness shewn to himself and his men by some Christians. He was converted, left the army, and became a hermit, much celebrated for his holiness and for his power of resisting sleep. His reputation soon attracted others who settled in the neighbourhood to learn from Pachomius the ascetic life, and to them he gave a rule. It is said that he recommended three monks to share one cell, and to divide their time between labour, study, and prayer. Discipline was maintained by priors, chosen for their merit and not simply for their age. Pachomius had a sister who followed her brother's example by founding near-by a convent for women with a similar rule of life.

All this happened in Egypt, where the climate and the vast

solitude of the desert favoured the development of monasticism, so that even in the time of Constantine there were large colonies of monks in the Nitrian Desert, west of Alexandria, and far to the south in the Thebaid. Visitors from all over the world came to see them, and thus, before long, others were moved to imitation. A certain Hilarion, sent from Palestine to Alexandria for his education, met Antony in Egypt, and returned to Palestine determined to live a hermit's life. Soon his disciples were numbered in thousands, and near-by a man named Epiphanius organized a regular monastery with a rule like that of Pachomius. Once established, monasticism spread rapidly, and in a few years hermitages and monasteries were scattered all over Syria. The desert north of the Lebanon was soon full of them, and by the end of the century all over the East the influence of the monks was an important factor in all matters ecclesiastical.

By some the practice of asceticism was carried to great extremes. Monk vied with monk in the effort to make life intolerable. Some browsed on roots and herbs with no shelter and very little clothing. Some fastened themselves with chains to rocks and posts. In the fifth century Simon Stylites buried himself in the ground with only his head visible, and later he built a pillar sixty feet high and only a yard square, on the top of which he lived for thirty years.¹ Some of the bishops tried to restrain the extravagances of the solitaries, but by the people they were held in great veneration, and even emperors consulted the most famous of them on matters of State.

However this type of asceticism may have commended itself to the fourth and fifth centuries, to us it seems to be worthy of an Indian fakir, rather than of a Christian monk.

¹ After his death a church was built about the pillar, the ruins of which may still be seen. (de Vogüé, *Syria Centrale*, p. 141.)

Happily the ascetic spirit had other manifestations. One of the most ardent admirers of the ascetic life was a young Cappadocian named Basil. He studied the ways of the Egyptian monks, and later adapted and organized monasticism to suit the conditions of Cappadocia. He encouraged his followers to form communities, moderated their extravagances, and put them under a regular discipline. Basil's monks were not allowed to live in idleness, but their time was divided between prayer, study of scripture, and healthy work in the fields. Learned monks were given every encouragement to pursue their studies. Basil himself, with his friend Gregory of Nazianzus, dwelt long in a remote retreat on the banks of the Iris in Pontus, and there they studied together the works of Origen and made a collection of the choicest passages. When Basil became bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia he never lost interest in the monks; he used them to serve his great hospital for the sick and poor, and the rule of life which he gave them became, and still is, the accepted code on which all eastern monasticism is founded.

The Church owes a great debt to St Basil for his work in organizing the monks, but some of them continued to provide a disorderly element in the Eastern Church. Many were ignorant and fanatical, and sometimes their methods of propagating their opinions were anything but gentle. Theodosius the Great published a law forbidding monks to live in towns where they were too often centres of disturbance, and at the councils of the fifth century they were a source of terror to the bishops of whose views they happened to disapprove, so that it was thought necessary before the Council of Chalcedon in 451 to expel all monks from the neighbourhood.¹ The same Council introduced a much-

¹ At the Council of Ephesus in 449 the monks handled the bishop of Constantinople so roughly that he died.

needed reform in putting monks under the authority of the bishops, whom previously they had been disposed to ignore.

Many people have a vague idea that monasticism is an invention of the Church of Rome. Nothing could be further from the truth. Monasticism, as we have seen, began in the East, and for a time its progress in the West was slow. Athanasius, driven from Alexandria in 339, spent some years in Rome, and had much to tell the Romans about the ascetics of Egypt. So the seeds of monasticism were planted in the West, but for half a century the movement made little progress. Then there was a wave of enthusiasm.

Much was due to St Martin of Tours. This celebrated saint was the son of a heathen officer, and was compelled by his father to enter the emperor's service. As a child of twelve he had secured admission as a catechumen, and while still a soldier he longed to be baptized and devote himself to the religious life. The story goes that one night, at Amiens, he cut his cloak in half to give to a starving beggar, and later Christ appeared in a vision wearing the cloak and saying, 'Martin, only a catechumen, has clothed me'. Martin determined to leave the army, and after many adventures he settled in a hermitage near Poitiers. There he gave himself to the ascetic life, others joined him, and thus was founded the monastery of Ligugé, the first monastic establishment in the West. A few years later, Martin, now bishop of Tours, founded another monastery on the banks of the Loire.

The fame of Martin spread far and wide. He was celebrated no less as an ascetic than as a destroyer of paganism, and when he died in 396 his funeral was attended by thousands of monks who looked to him as their spiritual father. The anniversary of his death, Nov. 11th, or Martinmas, still stands in our calendars.

By the end of the fourth century monasticism was established in Gaul, and there were ascetics in Italy and Spain; but the most extreme forms of Eastern asceticism do not seem to have appealed to the more sober Latins.

Early in the fifth century a step forward was taken when John Cassian, who had made a study of Eastern monasticism, introduced into southern Gaul an organization founded on eastern practices. He established two celebrated monasteries near Marseilles, and in his *Institutes* and *Collations* he describes the ideal monastic life as he conceived it. More than a hundred years later St Benedict, 'Patriarch of the Monks of the West', founded his famous monastic establishment on Monte Casino, and gave his monks the rule which, with various modifications, has served ever since for the guidance of Western monasticism.

In the dark centuries which followed the barbarian invasions the monasteries played an immensely important part, and it has been truly said that without monasticism Christianity could hardly have survived. The barbarians often respected the monasteries when they destroyed everything else, and many men and women found a refuge in the cloister from the violence which raged without. In later times scandals connected with the monasteries were many and grave; yet without the monks even less culture, and certainly less piety, would have survived the break-up of Roman civilization in the West. Many monks were missionaries, and we must not forget that Saxon England was converted by monks from Ireland, Scotland, and Rome.

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CHAPTER NINE

THE CHURCH IN ACTION

WHEN Constantine, by publishing the Edict of Milan in 313, delivered the Church from the danger of further persecution by the State, he rendered to Christianity a great service and gave to the Church a great opportunity. Christians, no longer treated as outcasts and criminals, were free to develop their institutions, to work out their theology, to perfect their organization, and to build up a Church which might include within its fold the whole population of the Empire. Yet the use made of this opportunity was in many ways disappointing. The Church found itself faced with a tremendous task. It had been hard enough to organize a comparatively small society, and to maintain religious fervour and moral purity among men and women who knew that at any moment they might be called upon to prove their sincerity with their blood; it was far harder to convert the whole world, and to raise the moral standards of the Empire to the level of the Christian life. When once the emperors had declared for Christianity, the Church began to grow into a fashionable institution. Those who wished to stand well with the authorities found it wiser to be converted; the institutions of heathenism, no longer supported by the State, rapidly declined; and before many years had passed Christianity became the established religion professed by almost everyone, but by some less from conviction than as a matter of course.

It is not surprising therefore that the fourth century witnessed a general decline in religious earnestness within the Church, and Church history after 313 is less heroic

than in the earlier period. Thousands of half-converted heathen were swept into the Church on the wave of its popularity, and in the great cities such as Alexandria and Antioch the Christians shewed themselves hardly less frivolous and disorderly than their heathen neighbours. Nor did the clergy always set a good example. Great controversies about doctrine began to disturb the peace of the Church, strong passions were aroused, bitter rivalries grew up between the great sees, and unscrupulous methods were often employed to gain an advantage. Above all, there was a tendency to forget the ethical simplicity of the Gospel in the general absorption in dogmatic disputes.

Yet the picture must not be painted too darkly. The contending bishops were not representative of the Church as a whole. There were other bishops not a few who were worthy of the saintly fame which they enjoyed, and their flocks included many who still displayed the fervour which had characterized early days. When the apostate Emperor Julian¹ was exhorting his subjects to the practice of virtue, he ordered them to imitate the Galileans. Never was a more sincere compliment paid.

We may catch something of the spirit of the age if we glance at the lives of two or three famous men.

ST AMBROSE

One of the great emperors of Rome was Theodosius I, a Spanish officer who became emperor of the East in 379, and who ruled the whole Empire for some years before his death in 395. And one of the great bishops of the fourth century was Ambrose, who ruled at Milan during the reign of Theodosius. 'I have known no bishop but Ambrose', Theodosius is reported to have said.

¹ See additional note at the end of the chapter.

Of high birth, Ambrose devoted his early years to the study of law, and when still young he was appointed to an important administrative post in northern Italy. Soon afterwards there was trouble over the election of a bishop for Milan, and so great was the uproar in the church that Ambrose marched down to quell the disturbance. He entreated the contending parties to keep the peace, and scarcely had he ceased speaking when a child's voice was heard crying 'Ambrose for Bishop!' It seemed like a voice from heaven, and all parties united in entreating Ambrose to be ordained and consecrated. He was as yet not even baptized, and he expressed the greatest unwillingness to assume this new and unfamiliar responsibility. But the people would take no refusal, and in due course the magistrate was baptized, ordained, and enthroned as bishop of Milan.

He quickly shewed that the choice had been a wise one. His character had always been noble, and he became an almost perfect type of the great episcopal rulers of the Western Church. Though no great scholar, and compelled, as he says, to learn and teach at the same time, he undertook with great devotion the systematic instruction of his flock. His sermons became world-famous, and it was partly by the influence of Ambrose that the great St Augustine was finally persuaded to embrace Christianity.

His influence over the people was extraordinary. There lived at Milan Justina, the widow of Valentinian I, and mother of the infant Emperor Valentinian II. Justina professed sympathy with the Arian heretics, who for some years had been the dominant party in the city until the election of Ambrose, who was strictly orthodox. The empress demanded that one church in the city should be set aside for Arian worship. Ambrose declined and told the

empress that 'a bishop could not give up the house of GOD'. 'Palaces may belong to the emperor, but churches belong to the bishop.' Justina was disposed to resort to force, and the Portian Basilica, a church outside the walls, was seized for the Arians; but so great was the popular indignation that the church was surrendered again to the clergy of Ambrose. In the following year there was another contest, and Ambrose was threatened with exile. The excitement of the populace was intense. For days they surrounded the bishop in his church, while Ambrose preached to them and taught them to sing the psalms antiphonally and Latin hymns composed by himself.¹ Augustine, who was present, describes this community singing as most inspiring. For the second time the court had to acknowledge defeat, and the soldiers surrounding the church were withdrawn. Ambrose's success in defying the imperial power increased his fame, and before long he had other opportunities of asserting his ecclesiastical authority. Northern Europe was for some years ruled by a usurper named Maximus, until Theodosius overthrew him in 388. The Eastern emperor stayed three years in the West, and during that time he made the acquaintance of Ambrose. Although their intercourse was by no means without friction, the two men held each other in great esteem. Two incidents are celebrated. There had been religious strife in a remote village on the Euphrates, where the people, instigated by the bishop, had destroyed a Jewish synagogue, and a party of monks had burnt the church of a gnostic sect. Theodosius was a sincere and orthodox Christian, but he was also an emperor, and he would not allow religious enthusiasm to

¹ Ambrose was justly famous as a hymn-writer, and some of his compositions are still in common use. Tradition wrongly ascribed to him the authorship of the *Te Deum*.

be made an excuse for civil disorder; so he wrote from Milan commanding that the monks should be punished and the synagogue rebuilt at the bishop's expense. Ambrose protested, urging that the emperor's action would give an undeserved triumph to the Jews, and that in all such matters civil justice must give way to religious interests. It was a bad argument, and Theodosius at first received it in silence; but when Ambrose reinforced his letter with a sermon preached in the emperor's presence, his eloquence prevailed, and Theodosius cancelled the order. 'The bishop's triumph', it has been said, 'marks the steady growth of sacerdotalism in the bad sense of the word'.¹ The days were not far away when obedience would be demanded in the name of the Church, right or wrong. But another incident reminds us that ecclesiastical authority might be more worthily used. In the early spring of 390 there was a serious riot at Thessalonica; the people murdered the Gothic commander of the garrison and several of his officers. The emperor, in a fit of rage, gave orders for a general massacre of the populace, and the soldiers, surrounding the amphitheatre, butchered seven thousand of the people in cold blood. Ambrose had no hesitation in excommunicating Theodosius. 'If you purpose being present I dare not offer the sacrifice.' Shortly afterwards the emperor came to Ambrose's church and the doors were shut in his face. For eight months he remained excommunicated, and then on Christmas Day 390 he did public penance in the church.

Later legend asserted that Ambrose flogged the emperor, and in art the saint is represented holding a scourge in his hand. But the story is remarkable enough without embellishments. When we remember that less than a century

¹ B. J. Kidd, *History of the Church*, ii, 360.

had passed since the Edict of Milan, we can appreciate the rapidity with which the Church had grown to power.

CHYRSOSTOM

Not all bishops displayed the courage and ability of Ambrose, and the life of one of his contemporaries shews us that the Church was not always victorious in contests with the civil power. While Ambrose was bishop of Milan, Antioch in Syria was rejoicing in a bishop who was no less famous in the East. John, surnamed in after years 'Chrysostom' (he of the golden mouth), was born in Antioch in 345. His mother, the saintly Anthusa, gave him a good education, and, like Ambrose, he studied law. But he hated the atmosphere of the courts, and longed to devote himself to the practice of asceticism. His ambition was to become a solitary in the desert, but for a time his mother's prayers deterred him, and he had to be content with the practice of 'discipline' at home. Then in 374 his mother died, so he set out for the mountains, and there for six years he endured every hardship which a misplaced ingenuity could devise. Returning at last to Antioch with a constitution permanently weakened, he was made deacon, and six years later (386) he was ordained priest. He soon became known as a great preacher. Week after week huge congregations were thrilled by his eloquence, and so rapt was the attention of the people that the preacher had to warn them of the danger from pickpockets.

In 387 came his great opportunity of serving the city. There had been a serious riot in which the statues of Theodosius and his family had been grossly insulted. The emperor's fiery temper was well known, and the city dreaded the punishment which was sure to follow. So the bishop, Flavian, lost no time in setting out to interview the

emperor and implore his forgiveness, or at least his moderation. It was a long journey to Constantinople, and during the anxious weeks before news of the result of Flavian's mission could be received Chrysostom preached twenty-one famous sermons 'On the Statues', urging the people of Antioch to take warning and to turn from their vicious ways. Theodosius refused to overlook the riot, and sent a commission to punish the city; but the sentence was much less severe than might have been expected. The whole incident produced a profound impression at Antioch. The conduct of Flavian, the moderating power of the Church, and the eloquence of Chrysostom had their effect; it seemed that Christ was greater than Augustus, and that year many heathen were converted to the Christian faith.

For some years Chrysostom continued his work as preacher and teacher, and it would have been well for him had he been left at Antioch in peace. But in 397 the Archbishop of Constantinople died, and the court determined to install the great preacher of Antioch in his place. His consent was hardly required, for he was seized by the agents of the Emperor Arcadius, hurried into a chariot, and driven with the utmost dispatch to the capital. In February 398 he was presented to the suffrages of the people, declared elected, and consecrated by Theophilus, Archbishop of Alexandria. Theophilus performed his office with a bad grace, for he was bitterly jealous of the growing influence of Constantinople, and wished to secure the see for a candidate of his own.

Chrysostom set to work to reform his diocese. Discipline had been slack in the capital, and the clergy were for the most part easy-going and self-indulgent. The new archbishop, brought up in an atmosphere of strict asceticism, not only set an example of plain living, but required

his clergy to mend their ways. 'He was a saint, and one of those unyielding saints in whose eyes principles are made to be put into practice.'¹ He denounced in no measured terms the easy morals of the clergy and the frivolous luxury of the laity. He insisted that the monks should stay in their monasteries and not wander about the city. He told the clergy to pay less attention to the pursuit of wealth and more to their spiritual duties; instead of dining out they must conduct the night offices of the Church.

Very soon the new archbishop, though admired by some for his eloquence, and loved by the poor for his liberality, was thoroughly unpopular with the clergy, and, what was more serious, he was cordially disliked by the court. Arcadius was a feeble sovereign, ruled either by his ministers or by his wife. Chief among his favourites was a certain Eutropius, a man of bad character, who for some years had been supreme. At last he quarrelled with Eudoxia, the empress, and she demanded his dismissal. Arcadius deprived him of his office, and Eutropius, knowing that with so many enemies dismissal meant death, fled for sanctuary to the church. Chrysostom was under no delusions as to his character, but he would not allow the right of sanctuary to be violated. He bravely faced the soldiers who were clamouring for the eunuch's blood, declared that no one should enter the sanctuary save over his body, and persuaded the emperor to send Eutropius into banishment. Next day he preached on the vanity of worldly power to a vast congregation, who could see the once powerful minister still clinging to the altar.

Chrysostom's own turn was to come. Eudoxia had been friendly at first, and had even joined in the archbishop's processions; but now that her rival Eutropius was out of

¹ Duchesne, *The Early History of the Church*, iii, 52.

the way she began to see in Chrysostom another competitor for the favour of the emperor. The archbishop was far from tactful. He denounced some of the court ladies as 'old women who tried to look young again', and in a sermon he alluded to the empress as Jezebel surrounded by the priests of Baal. Very soon he found himself beset by enemies, with Theophilus of Alexandria at their head, and Eudoxia only waiting for a chance to get rid of him. We need not enter into the details of a very shameful story. In 403 Theophilus arrived in Constantinople and organized the enemies of Chrysostom—all those who were jealous of him, all who had been offended by his outspoken sermons, and all who resented his strictness of life. A synod was held, which the archbishop refused to attend. He was condemned on twenty-nine trumped-up charges and declared deposed. The emperor, at the request of the synod, sent him into exile.

But the populace had to be reckoned with. No sooner did they hear that their archbishop was banished, than a howling mob beset the palace to demand his recall. Eudoxia was frightened no less by the crowd than by an earthquake which shook the city. Messengers were sent to implore Chrysostom to return, and a delighted multitude seated him again upon the bishop's throne. His triumph seemed complete, and Theophilus discreetly set forth for Alexandria.

The peace between the empress and the archbishop was not likely to be enduring, and very soon fresh trouble arose. The vanity of Eudoxia was gratified by the erection of a silver statue in her honour, and its dedication was celebrated with dancing and revelry. Chrysostom, indignant that such an exhibition of the old pagan spirit should be made within sight of his church, ascended the pulpit and

denounced the empress in no measured terms: 'Again Herodias rages; again she dances; again she demands the head of John on a charger'. So at least his words were reported to the empress, and she determined at all costs to be rid of him. Another synod was held, well packed with his enemies, which requested the emperor to have the archbishop removed; and this time even the support of the people was unavailing. In June 404 Chrysostom was banished to a desolate spot in Lower Armenia, and, since that was not enough to satisfy his enemies, three years later orders were issued for his removal to Pityus on the north-east shores of the Euxine. He died on the way, as it was certainly hoped that he would. For years his friends in Constantinople, the 'Johannites' as they were called, were bitterly persecuted, and not till 438 was the quarrel forgotten and his remains brought back with great pomp to the capital.

The careers of Ambrose and Chrysostom illustrate the best and the worst in the Church life of their age. In both men we see the courage of great churchmen in boldly rebuking vice even in high places, and in striving to maintain Christian moral standards. But we see too a certain arrogance and priestly pride which in the case of Chrysostom was not disguised by tact and which often gave unnecessary offence. The history of Ambrose shews how the Church led by a strong man could hold its own even against one of the greatest emperors. But in the East conditions were different. Not only was Chrysostom's a weaker character, but the Church in the East was too divided by the jealousies of the clergy to present a united front to the world. The fatal jealousy of Alexandria, Antioch, Ephesus and Constantinople weakened the Church's influence and debased its moral tone, so that Chrysostom, for all his

greatness, was defeated by the frivolous wife of one of the most contemptible of the emperors. So it was in later history. The Western Church, led by the Pope, met kings and emperors on equal terms, and often defeated them; the Byzantine Church has always tended to become a department of State, controlled in the last resort not by its bishops and patriarchs, but by emperors, their wives, and their ministers.

ADDITIONAL NOTE ON JULIAN THE APOSTATE

On the whole the resistance of paganism to the advance of Christianity was surprisingly feeble, but one great attempt to revive the ancient worship was made by Julian, who was emperor from 361 to 363.

Julian had been brought up as a Christian by his uncle Constantius, but his leaning was always towards Neo-Platonism, and as soon as he dared he declared himself a heathen. He was proclaimed emperor by the legions in Gaul, with whom he was very popular, and when Constantius died in 361 Julian became sole ruler of the Roman world. He did not actually persecute the Church, but he abolished all the privileges of the Christians, forbade them to teach in the schools, and did all in his power to discourage Christianity. He believed that by the exercise of his patronage he would be able to revive the waning enthusiasm of his subjects for the cause of the gods, and he planned to create a holy catholic pagan Church, with an organized priesthood, daily worship, regular instruction, the administration of charity, and a system of penance—everything which 'the Galileans' had except their faith.

The emperor set his subjects an example of pagan piety, offered sacrifices innumerable, and filled his court with philosophers and lecturers. But even before his early death

it had become plain that his attempt was doomed to failure. A large proportion of the population had now become Christian, and only a few time-servers were willing to change their religion at the command of the emperor. Even those who were still heathen viewed with amusement the emperor's enthusiasm. Priests and philosophers accepted their salaries, but they scarcely troubled to conceal their contempt for the antiquated ceremonies in which Julian delighted, and they exhibited none of the virtues which even he was compelled to admire among the Galileans. Heathenism had no vitality, and when the emperor was killed by the Persians in 363 the pagan revival collapsed. All future emperors were Christians.

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CHAPTER TEN

THE CHURCH SUPREME

THEODOSIUS the Great ruled from 379 to 395, and it was he who established Christianity as the official religion of the Empire. It was he too who enforced orthodoxy:

It is our pleasure that all nations which are governed by our Clemency and Moderation should steadfastly adhere to the religion which was taught by St Peter to the Romans, which faithful tradition has preserved, which is now professed by the Pontiff Damasus, and by Peter, Bishop of Alexandria. We authorize the followers of this doctrine to assume the title of Catholic Christians, and we brand all others with the infamous name of heretics. They must expect to suffer the severe penalties which our Authority, guided by the heavenly Wisdom, shall think proper to inflict upon them.

Theodosius himself was not much inclined to persecute, and his threats do not seem to have been often put into force, but a fatal policy was thus defined. The days were to come when the State would feel justified in employing any cruelty in the supposed duty of suppressing heresy. In the fourth century the emperors used the weapon of banishment freely against ecclesiastics who seemed to stand in the way of unity, but as yet the general conscience condemned stronger measures; and when, towards the end of the century, a sect of ascetic enthusiasts called Priscillianists were subjected to bloody persecution in Spain, men like Ambrose and Martin of Tours protested vigorously. In the following century, however, circumstances led to the further employment of force.

The story is connected with the career of the celebrated saint, Augustine, bishop of Hippo, in North Africa. He was born in 354 in a small town in Numidia called Tagaste. His mother Monnica was a devout Christian, but he himself grew up with no settled religious convictions. After a good education he became a teacher of rhetoric, first at Carthage, then at Rome, and finally at Milan. His life was immoral, and his opinions varied between Manicheism, an Eastern dualist religion with a tinge of Christianity which was now winning many converts in the Empire, and Neo-Platonism, the latest form of Greek philosophy. His mother never ceased to hope and pray for his conversion to Christianity, and for several years Augustine thought seriously of baptism; but it was not until 387 at Milan that the united influence of Monnica and Ambrose led him to embrace the Christian faith.

In his famous *Confessions* Augustine has told the whole story of his inward struggles and of his final surrender to Christ. One day he had gone out into the garden of his house at Milan, and casting himself down under a fig-tree he meditated and prayed. He must give up his sinful life. He would do so to-morrow. Why not to-day? 'Why not this hour make an end of my uncleanness?' Suddenly from a neighbouring house he heard a voice as of a child, 'Take read, Take read', oft repeated. It must be a divine command. So he returned to the house and seized a volume of St Paul which lay upon the table. Opening it at random his eye fell on the words of Romans xiii, 13, 14: 'Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying: but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.' 'No further would I read, nor was there need; for instantly at the end of the sentence, as though

my heart were flooded with a light of peace, all the shadows of doubt melted away.¹

Soon afterwards Augustine resigned his professorship and prepared for baptism, and the following Easter he was baptized by Ambrose, together with his son and a devoted friend. Monnica died on their way back to Africa, happy in the knowledge that her prayers had been answered. Augustine and his friends 'offered the sacrifice of our redemption on her behalf'.

Four years after his return to Africa, Augustine was ordained, and in 396 he became bishop of Hippo Regius, where the rest of his life was to be spent. His native ability and the culture he had previously acquired as a rhetorician he now used in the service of the Church, and he became famous as a preacher and teacher. His numerous books provided the chief theological reading in the Middle Ages, and his influence over both Catholic and Protestant theology has been greater than that of any other writer.

As bishop Augustine found himself faced with the problem of the Donatists, a fanatical sect who had been causing great confusion in North Africa for nearly a hundred years. Donatism had originated as a result of the Diocletian persecution, when many Christians had dissented from the attitude of the bishops of Carthage towards those who had compromised their faith. They had been fiercely opposed to the appointment of Caecilian as bishop in 311 on the alleged ground that he had been consecrated by a bishop who was himself a *traditor*, that is, one who had surrendered the sacred Scriptures to be burnt. Constantine did his best to satisfy the malcontents and ordered a full investigation, which proved that their charges were without foundation; but they refused to be reconciled, and formed a schismatic

¹ *Confessions*, viii, 12.

body under the leadership of a certain Donatus. The movement spread, and in the days of Augustine there were not less than three hundred Donatist bishops in North Africa. Like the Novatians before them, they stood for a puritan conception of the Church, and they abhorred the companionship of Catholic Christians because they included among them many who had in various ways fallen into sin. The African temper was always uncompromising, and the Donatists became dangerous fanatics. Many of them joined bands of roving brigands who terrorized the country in the name of Christ, and with heavy clubs fell on defenceless persons who dared to dissent from their views. These Circumcellions, as they were called, committed innumerable outrages, and in parts of Africa they made life almost intolerable.

Augustine did his best to reduce the Donatists to reason, and in opposition to their puritan theories developed his doctrine of the nature of the Church, a doctrine which passed almost unchallenged until the Reformation. There is only one Church, a visible society which can be traced back by uninterrupted succession to the Apostles. It is the sacred Ark in which alone there is safety, but outside which there is no salvation. Like Noah's Ark, the Church contains clean and unclean beasts, and it is not for men to make the final separation. As the drag-net in the parable contained fish good and bad, as the wheat and the tares grew together until the harvest, so the Church has worthy and unworthy members. By the sacraments she conveys divine food to the soul, and by her discipline she strives to enforce the commands of Christ; but GOD, not man, is the final Arbiter. The self-righteousness of the Donatists, cut off though they are from the appointed channels of grace, implies an enlightenment which they do not possess.

These arguments did not avail to stem the tide of fanaticism, and so unbearable did the outrages of the Donatists become, that in 404 the Catholic bishops were compelled to appeal to the Emperor Honorius for protection. The government acted promptly and firmly; a commission was dispatched to Africa, and the Donatists were suppressed by military force. At first Augustine was opposed to the employment of force against his opponents, and only after some years of fruitless argument did his patience give way. Then he quoted the text, 'Compel them to come in' (Luke xiv, 23), in justification of persecution, and so gave his authority to the mediaeval belief that the State should suppress heretics by force. It was a very unhappy precedent, but we must remember that the Donatists were not ordinary misbelievers, but violent and dangerous fanatics such as no efficient secular government could be expected to tolerate. Their cry, 'What has the emperor to do with the Church?' sounds plausible, but they themselves had appealed to Constantine, and throughout the controversy they had shewn themselves ready to use the utmost violence against their opponents. They that take the sword shall perish by the sword, and they must not expect much sympathy.

Augustine, assisted by the State, reconciled many of the Donatists to the Church, but the schism proved the ruin of African Christianity, and when a few years later the country was overrun by the Vandals the remaining Donatists joined the invaders in wasting the province. Augustine died during the siege of Hippo in 430.

These were dark days for the Empire. The weakling Arcadius ruled in the East, and his equally feeble brother Honorius was emperor in the West. Everywhere the barbarians were over the frontiers. Africa was harried by

wild tribes from the desert, Gaul was invaded by Franks and Germans, Spain was in the hands of the Vandals, and a Gothic army under Alaric marched up and down Italy with no effective opposition from the enfeebled legions. In 410 Rome was taken and sacked by Alaric, and many of the inhabitants fled to Africa, as the one province which at the moment seemed reasonably safe. There their voices were raised in lamentation for their fate, and not a few suggested that the fall of Rome was due to the anger of the insulted gods. The conduct of these refugees moved Augustine to begin his greatest literary work, *The City of God*, an apology for Christianity, in which he seeks to refute once and for all the idea that the disasters which had overtaken the world were due to the spread of Christianity. The gods had never protected any city because they had never existed!

The *De Civitate Dei* is more than an attack on heathenism. Augustine goes on to contrast with the City of Man, which is the State, the City of God, which is the Church, inviolable and eternal. The Christian man belongs to both, and to the State he must discharge the duties of citizenship; but here he has no continuing city, and only in the Church can he find what is immutable and eternal. Thus Augustine laid down that theory of the relation of Church and State as two independent spheres which dominated mediaeval thought. We are citizens of earth, but we are also citizens of heaven; and inasmuch as heavenly citizenship is on a higher plane than that of earth, duty towards the Church must take precedence over all other interests. In the conditions which ruled throughout the Middle Ages conflicts of interest were frequent and inevitable, but the popes were always able to rely on Augustine's theory to support the superior claims of their authority.

Emperors ruled at Constantinople until 1453, when the city was captured by the Turks; but the Western Empire came to an inglorious end in 476 when the last Western emperor was deposed and Italy became a Gothic kingdom, only nominally under the rule of Constantinople. The last phase appears in the pontificate of Leo the Great, bishop of Rome from 440 to 461, when the Empire was humiliated and the Church was supreme. Leo's influence may be illustrated by his famous encounter with Attila, King of the Huns. During the first half of the fifth century these dreaded barbarians had been steadily pursuing their almost uninterrupted conquests, and by the middle of the century their rule was unchallenged from China to Germany, from Persia to the Arctic. Attila came to the throne in 433, and the Roman Empire was threatened by a great leader with an innumerable host of fierce and hardy barbarians under his command. At the invitation of the Vandals, who found their position in Africa threatened, the Huns invaded the Empire, and in a few months Thrace and Macedonia were desolated. Theodosius II sued for peace, and for some years the Empire paid a humiliating tribute. Then war broke out again, and Attila prepared to conquer the Roman world. In 452 he invaded Italy. For a time he carried all before him, and so great was the devastation that Attila could boast that the grass never grew again where his horse had trod. Rome seemed doomed, and the Western emperor, Valentinian III, prepared to flee the country. Before he left he sent an abject embassy imploring the Huns to spare Rome. The emperor's delegate was a certain Avienus, and with him went the courageous Pope. To the general surprise Attila received the embassy with favour and even respect, and terms were agreed by which the impending destruction of

Rome was averted. Legend says that the Apostles Peter and Paul appeared and threatened Attila with instant death if he ignored the entreaties of their successor. It is not improbable that the fierce barbarian felt a superstitious awe in the presence of the great representative of spiritual power. He retreated, and Rome was saved. A few months later Attila died, and the Empire of the Huns went to pieces; but Rome was sacked again by the Vandals in 455, and this time even the authority of the clergy did little to mitigate the violence of the barbarians.

Nevertheless the story of Leo's intervention is remarkable as illustrating the power now wielded by the Church. Nothing could stop the incursions of the barbarians, but the Church did much to tame and civilize the invaders, and although it was long before Goths, Franks, and Vandals could be turned into passable Christians, the dark ages would have been very much darker if the Church had not preserved some traditions of saintliness and culture.

The organization of the Western Church centred in the papacy, and Leo may be said to be the first great mediaeval Pope. He intervened in the controversy concerning the divine and human natures in Christ, which was convulsing the East, and a letter of his on the subject (his famous 'Tome') fairly represents the settlement reached at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. If he was not able to prevent the same Council setting up a Patriarchate at Constantinople, destined ultimately to rival Rome, it was not that Leo displayed any excessive modesty in asserting his own authority and the unique dignity of his see. As Peter was head of the Apostles, and all others received their authority through him, so, he maintained, Peter's successor at Rome has supreme jurisdiction, and all other churches owe obedience to him. In Leo Peter still rules,

for in his see there lives on his power and the excellence of his authority. The Pope is the mediator between Christ and His Church, and he is the channel through which flows all sacramental grace.

The great Churches of the East were not prepared to admit these claims, and the Eastern bishops only flattered the bishop of Rome when they wanted his support. But in the West the papal claims were hardly questioned. 'Leo found Rome Christian, and left it Catholic.'

And here we must bring to an end our brief study of the triumph of the Christian Church. From Augustus to Leo was a period of four centuries and a half, and how great a change those centuries witnessed! Some historians, such as Gibbon, have been disposed to ascribe the break-up of the Empire to the influence of Christianity, which challenged accepted standards, and undermined the 'will to power' of the earlier Romans. But it seems more true to say that the Western Empire fell through the steady accumulation of economic difficulties, and the overwhelming pressure of the barbarian invaders. Empires, like men, seem to grow old, wear out, and die. Weakened by plagues, famines, and the constant strain of war, Rome found itself no longer able to cope with the invading hordes from Asia and the North, and the people grew weary of the struggle. Gwatkin used to say that the Empire fell when it had succeeded in convincing its subjects that the violence of the barbarians could not be more intolerable than the exactions of the civilized government.

It was due to the Church that even in the West something was saved from the general wreck, and although for many centuries Europe was submerged under a wave of barbarism, the Church still preserved some memory of the language, culture, and ideals of the ancient world, and

when social and political conditions improved civilization began to flower again.

The victory of Christianity over all other forms of faith was no accident, but testifies unmistakably to the inherent power of the Gospel. By the end of the fifth century Christianity was almost universally professed throughout the Roman world, and what of paganism the Church could not destroy it was content to absorb. Far beyond the limits of the Empire the name of Christ was revered. Many of the northern barbarians were converted by Arian missionaries, and it was long before they accepted the orthodox faith. In the East another heretical sect, the Nestorians, were the great missionaries who carried the Cross even as far as China. There was a strong Persian Church, and in the heart of Africa Abyssinia was Christian. Not all the ground thus won was to be held, for Mohammedanism took the place of Christianity in North Africa, and later, the Turks were to prove great enemies of the Church; but for a time the victory seemed complete, and, as Julian was believed to have said, 'the Galilean' had conquered. The miracle of the spread of Christianity was due, under Providence, to the heroism and devotion of Christians. The Church often failed to make the best use of its opportunities, but the more we learn of the difficulties which it encountered, the more we shall admire the measure of its success.

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TABLE OF IMPORTANT EVENTS, ETC.

B.C.

31. Battle of Actium.

A.D.

14. Death of Augustus.

14-37. Tiberius, emperor.

41-54. Claudius, emperor.

54-68. Nero, emperor.

64. Fire of Rome; persecution by Nero.

69-79. Vespasian, emperor.

70. Fall of Jerusalem.

81-96. Domitian, emperor; persecution renewed.

96. Flavius Clemens executed; Flavia Domitilla banished.

97. Letter of Clement to Corinthian Christians (date uncertain).

98-117. Trajan, emperor.

115. Martyrdom of Ignatius (date uncertain).

112 (c.). Pliny writes to Trajan.

117-138. Hadrian, emperor.

130. The *Shepherd of Hermas* written (perhaps considerably earlier).

133. Apology of Quadratus.

135. Final destruction of Jerusalem.

138-161. Antoninus Pius, emperor.

155. Martyrdom of Polycarp at Smyrna.

161-180. Marcus Aurelius, emperor.

165. Justin martyred at Rome.

177. Persecution at Lyons and Vienne.

180-192. Commodus, emperor.

182. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons.

193-211. Septimius Severus, emperor.

202. Law forbidding persons to be made Jews or Christians.

202. Martyrdom of Perpetua and her companions.

249-251. Decius Trajan, emperor.

248. Cyprian becomes bishop of Carthage.

250. Persecution by Decius.

251. Novatian schism at Rome.

A.D.

253-259. Valerian, emperor.
 257. Edict against Christians.
 257. Martyrdom of Cyprian.
 259-268. Gallienus, emperor.
 259. Christianity made a *religio licita*.
 270-275. Aurelian, emperor.
 284-305. Diocletian, emperor.
 > 303. Diocletian persecution begins. First three edicts.
 304. Fourth edict.
 305. Constantine proclaimed Augustus at York.
 311. Edict of toleration issued by Galerius.
 312. Battle of the Milvian Bridge.
 313. Edict of Milan issued by Constantine and Licinius.
 314. Synod of Arles, attended by three British bishops.
 318. Outbreak of Arian controversy at Alexandria.
 323. Constantine defeats Licinius and rules as sole emperor.
 325. Council of Nicaea.
 328. Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria.
 334. Constantinople completed.
 335. Synod of Tyre condemns Athanasius.
 336. Athanasius banished.
 337. Death of Constantine.
 337. Athanasius returns to Alexandria.
 337-340. Constantine II, emperor.
 337-350. Constans, emperor.
 337-361. Constantius, emperor.
 339. Second banishment of Athanasius.
 341. Council of the Dedication at Antioch; four creeds approved as substitutes for the Creed of Nicaea.
 346. Return of Athanasius to Alexandria.
 356. Expulsion of Athanasius from Alexandria.
 361-363. Julian, emperor.
 361. Return of Athanasius.
 362. Athanasius exiled again.
 364-375. Valentinian I, emperor of the West.
 364-378. Valens, emperor of the East.
 364. Athanasius returns.
 365. Athanasius exiled for the fifth time.

A.D.

- 366. Final return of Athanasius to Alexandria.
- 370. Basil made bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia.
- 373. Death of Athanasius.
- 374. Ambrose made bishop of Milan.
- 378. Defeat of Valens by the Goths at Adrianople.
- 379-395. Theodosius the Great, emperor.
- 381. Second General Council at Constantinople.
- 387. Riots at Antioch.
- 387. Conversion of St Augustine.
- 395-408. Arcadius, emperor in the East.
- 395-423. Honorius, emperor in the West.
- 398. John Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople.
- 404. Exile of Chrysostom.
- 408-450. Theodosius II, emperor in the East.
- 410. Rome taken by Alaric.
- 424-455. Valentinian III, emperor in the West.
- 428. Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople.
- 430. Death of St Augustine.
- 431. Third General Council at Ephesus condemns Nestorius.
- 440. Leo the Great, bishop of Rome.
- 450-457. Pulcheria and Marcian rule in the East.
- 451. Fourth General Council at Chalcedon.
- 455. Rome sacked by the Vandals.
- 461. Death of Leo the Great.
- 476. Fall of the Western Empire.

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